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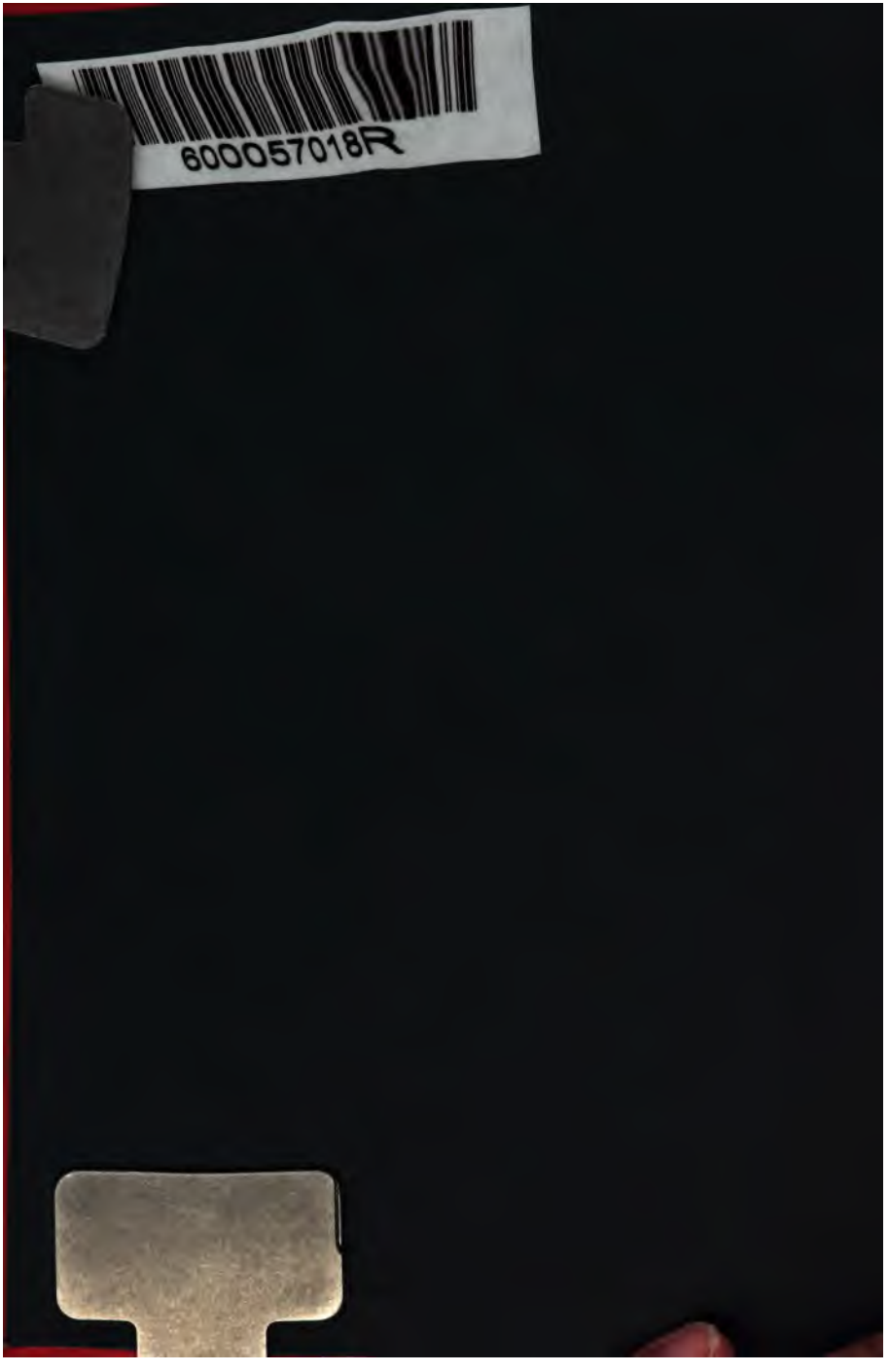
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THE

MIDLANDS AND OTHERS.

BY

HENRY LYTTLEJOHN.

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THE MIDLANDS AND OTHERS.

CHAPTER I.

On this raw and dreary December day it was a relief, to the sense of sight at least, when darkness set in soon after three o'clock, and mantled the choking and eye-stinging London fog. The increased number of gaslights produced, comparatively, a bright and cheerful effect: for, though the lamps were but dimly visible across the hazy street, the flaring burners in the butchers' shops, and the reflected flames which brilliantly displayed the glittering treasures of the silversmiths,

pleasantly allured attention from the depressing influence of the sooty atmosphere.

The main thoroughfares afforded, in this respect, a strong contrast to their dingy tributaries. At a few yards on either side of the gaudy and dazzling Strand the narrow streets seemed no better than skulking-places for the destitute and forlorn. Here, at long intervals only, was there any attraction to arrest the momentary curiosity of the foot passenger. Perhaps a stray tobacconist, thrust from the crowded throng by overwhelming competition, had so arrayed his scanty store of penny Pickwicks and creamy meerschaums, as to ensnare the admiration of some passing idler: perhaps the open-armed "Palace," at the corner, presented some scene of degradation quickened by brutal ribaldry, which even the callous stopped to gape at: the pawnbroker's, too,

with its tokens of poverty and distress, might have its charms: or, above all, the "alamode" shop, where visions of bliss incarnate gleamed through steaming panes, would solicit the attention of some ragged members of the great Un-Fed.

Here, indeed, some loiterers were sure to be assembled: and what lean and haggard wretches they mostly were! Look at that lad with the door-mats on his back. Who would believe that he had carried his burden all the way to Hammersmith, and was returning to Bethnal Green? He had a cup of (so-called) coffee before starting; but has tasted nothing since. With what famished eyes he peers through those bleared window panes. The greasy cook is sharpening a long carving blade, no wider than a skewer, and addresses himself to an uncut leg of roasted pork. The blisters on the crackling are all bubbling, so

hot is the savoury joint. He of the door mats calculates the distance from Covent Garden to Globe Town. He has yet four miles to trudge. He has eighteenpence in his pocket—the price of two mats at ninepence. And now the operator makes his first incision, and lays the tempting slice upon the plate. The starving lad sets down the mats, and fumbles in his pocket for the coins. A vision crosses him; and obscures the beautiful roast pork—a vision of three starving little ones, and a starving mother; who, as it happens (though he is scarcely twenty), all belong to him. For sixpence he could have "a reg'lar tightener," and leave a shilling to the good. There goes that cook again; another slice! How brown and crisp the crackling is! How white and sapid is the meat! He wipes the window panes to feast upon the sight; and proceeds to make the following computations:

"If it takes twelve hours' walking to sell two mats at ninepence, how shall I feed mother and the kids if I eat sixpence now?" The Rule of Three couldn't do it, and looking at the pork couldn't do it. So the lad sighs, hitches up the door-mats, and crawls wearily to Globe Town.

A pair of urchins—male and female—take the mat-man's place. Each little wreckling has a broom beneath its arm; and, with chilblained hands thrust into holes of tattered garments, they dance upon the sleety pavement to warm their naked feet: then flatten their noses against the panes aforesaid. Those blocks of smoking pudding are what these imps most covet. "Golly, Bill," says one, "how that bloke's a tucking of it in! don't I just wish I was him!"

"Perhaps," says Bill, "he'll put some in his pocket; see if I don't prig it if he do." "Oh

look! there's a galopschous fid. Aint you got narra copper?" Bill wipes a drop from his nose with his elbow, and sadly shakes his head. "I know which piece I'd choose if I had." "That ere bit in the corner?" "No, silly! that plummy bit, second from the top." "Now then, you monkeys," cries a pleasant voice behind them, "which of you is hungriest?" "I am, sir," yell both in chorus. "And which is the best of you?" "Jane is," says the boy. "Bill, sir," says the girl. "Then Jane and Bill shall have their fill," says the pleasant gentleman, and conducts them both within the beef shop.

While the happy children are tossing lumps of hot pudding from hand to hand to cool it, let us glance at the benevolent personage who is treating them. He is a fine handsome man, with a clean-shaved ruddy face. Good

humour beams from every line of it. His dress is clerical—not of our modern fashions, when no coat-collar means one creed, and no shirt-collar another; but of an older school, when jabots—large bosom frills—were worn, and yards of limp muslin swathed the throats of our ancestors. There is more of the squire than of the parson in his looks; though in truth our friend is both. John Seabright has come to London for a couple of days to consult his man of business about investments, and to order a new suit of clothes. He generally runs up at this season of the year for these two purposes; though he particularly dislikes the bother of looking after his money, and has no less horror of new garments. But he enjoys a gossip with his old friends; and of all things delights in a little dinner with the choicest of them, at the Athenæum, or the Oxford and

Cambridge Club. Mr. Seabright has a wife, rather a vulgar and not very interesting person (whom we shall not trouble ourselves with at present), and an only daughter—the heiress to the Longthorpe estates; with whom we shall soon be intimate.

To return to the eating-shop, where our friend is amusing himself with the insatiable capacities of the little crossing-sweepers. While these were busy within, another hunger-driven individual halted in front of the windows, and canvassed with careful eye the merits of the various condiments. To outward appearances he was not the sort of person whom one would expect to resort to such an establishment for refection. He was a tall, portly man, dressed in a blue frock coat, trimmed with velvet cuffs, and collar. His satin stock was ornamented with a large cameo pin;

and around his neck was displayed a gold watch-guard, of dubious intrinsic value. He carried a mounted cane, decorated with a tassel. His hat was bell-shaped, much curled and curved about the brim. To be sure this latter article of his dress was napless; and had the light been stronger, his apparel generally would have shown some signs of wear; but in the fog he did not look like one to take his meals with crossing-sweepers in a beef shop. Perhaps the man himself had some such qualms about propriety. Having resolved to enter, he first looked round to see who watched him; then plunged with hasty movements at the doorway.

At the moment of his entrance Mr. Seabright was coming out; and being a step above the other, received the bell-crowned hat full butt against his stomach. Something like an oath

burst from the lips of the angry incomer; when, looking up at the innocent cause of his annoyance, a shock of surprise instantly dispelled his indignation. The altered expression on his face seemed to indicate a half-framed thought of flight. Probably he would have obeyed this impulse had retreat been possible without mutual recognition. It was not so: the indecision was therefore transient. With the rapidity of thought, purpose and manner both were changed.

"Confound the step!" exclaimed the enterer. "I haven't hurt you, Mr. Seabright, have I?" And seizing the clergyman's hand in both his own, he expressed a rapturous delight at the encounter. "I saw you," said the stranger, "taking a snack inside there; and was in such a hurry to get at you that I nearly knocked you down, ha! ha! But what has brought you to our little

village? Pleasure I hope, business I suppose. Who would expect to see this benevolent visage in an alamode shop?"

"Well," said Mr. Seabright, a fresh beam of pleasure lighting up his features at the sight of an acquaintance, "one might be in a worse place, especially about this time of day. 'Tis very well for such rare spirits as you, Mombrun, to despise the vulgar charms of beef and pudding; but ordinary stomachs"—Mr. Seabright glanced humorously at his friend's rotundity—"require support."

"I hope, sir, you have been served here to your satisfaction?"

"I? no, I merely went in to watch a couple of ravenous brats fill their little bellies; and was thinking of looking out for a dinner myself."

"I suppose," said Mr. Mombrun, "you go to

your club for that purpose? otherwise we might have dined together. The fact is, I was on my way to Browser's when I saw you."

"Why should not I join you? Is it a tidy sort of place?"

"Browser's? the best tavern in London; and close at hand—just round the corner, to boot."

"That's famous!" cried Mr. Seabright, "though I hope, my friend, you won't think that I intrude upon you?"

"My dear sir! what greater pleasure could I devise than a snug dinner with my honoured friend?" And linking his arm in the clergyman's, they walked briskly towards the Strand.

Having cast a scrutinizing eye around the coffee-room, Mr Mombrun chose a table in a corner near the fire; and beckoned the waiter, with whom he exchanged some confidential whis-

pers. The latter appeared both gratified and amazed. "It was not every day," he said, "that he had the pleasure of serving an archbishop."

Mr. Seabright, who was absolutely indifferent about his fare, seemed puzzled by the long list of dishes from which he was requested to select. His friend volunteered to relieve him of the responsibility; and entered into consultation with the waiter on the comparative merits of the different joints.

"Very nice saddle of mutton," suggested the attendant.

Mombrun shook his head.

"Beautiful rumpsteak pudding, sir—suit his lordship to a T," with a wink at the archbishop.

"A vulgar dish," returned Mombrun, "what's the turkey like?"

"First rate, sir: not up yet; five minutes—ready to follow soup and fish. And wine, sir?"

"What wine do you take?" asked Mombrun, referring to his companion.

"Please yourself, please yourself," said Mr. Seabright. "If I get my toothful of port after dinner that's all I care for."

"Champagne," whispered Mombrun. "And Charles,—"

"George, sir," says the waiter.

"Well iced, mind, George. And, George, a pint of sherry—East India. And now, excellent sir," —Mombrun tucked the corner of his napkin into his waistcoat, and made other little arrangements for his comforts—"tell me something of my friends at Longthorpe and the Castle. How is the fair partner of your bosom? And how is the lovely Helen?"

Mr. Seabright replied that his wife and daughter were never better.

"And my old friend the duke? And the dear boy who has done so much credit to my instruction?"

"His grace is in excellent health," said Mr. Seabright, "but your pupil, the young marquis, is only so-so."

"Indeed I'm grieved to hear it. Ah! here's the soup—mock turtle; a lemon, George, and the Cayenne."

"Only a little hipped, I trust. The lad has been out of spirits for some time."

"Ay, ay, choked with the golden spoon, I suppose; killed with pleasure and the labours of *far niente*. George, another plate of mock turtle."

Mr. Seabright was amazed at the voracity of his companion. Mombrun's small grey eyes

sparkled at the sight of his food. His huge fleshy face was distorted with savage eagerness. The wings of his small mean nose dilated with quickened respiration, and his whole frame glowed with the fierce enjoyment of deglutition. Plateful after plateful disappeared before his cravings were appreciably diminished; and not till then did he pay any but simulated attention to the remarks of Mr. Seabright.

"Well," said he, after washing down his third help of turkey with a bumper of wine, "I do not hesitate to affirm that that was one of the noblest fowls that ever fell a sacrifice in the cause of man. George, another bottle of champagne."

As Mr. Mombrun threw himself back in his chair he presented a picture of complete contentment. In one hand he held his replenished glass, with the other he turned over the coins in his

pocket. The total amount which he was at present able to finger amounted exactly to one shilling and a halfpenny. He reflected that he had never sat down to a better dinner in his life, and as he contemplated the amiable countenance of his friend—also agreeably animated by the generous wine—his smile was quite benign; for he considered how little this repast would cost him.

What observations had been allowed to interrupt the more important business of the table, ran mainly on their common acquaintances at Longthorpe and Tramways. Tramways Castle, as need not be told, is the seat of the Duke of Midland. It was during a residence there of nearly two years as private tutor to the duke's only son, the Marquis of Northern, that Mombrun became acquainted with Mr. Seabright, when

estate at Longthorpe is within a couple of miles of his grace's.

It may seem rather surprising that a person in Mr. Mombrun's condition should have filled so responsible a post in one of the first families of England. Let us explain this apparent incongruity at once. In the first place, it was ten or twelve years before the opening of this history that Mombrun occupied the situation. The coat he wears now may be somewhat threadbare: ten years ago he had a better. Secondly, Mombrun is an accomplished scholar; thoroughly competent to instruct any youth in classics and mathematics, whatever may be his attainments, or default of them, in ethics. Thirdly, he had (indeed, still has, as we shall have abundant opportunities of seeing) a friend, a devoted friend, in a certain old maid named Miss Lavinia Mumford, who lives

close to Tramways, and is much esteemed by the Duke and Duchess of Midland. It was this lady whose recommendation and interest, far more than his own qualifications, obtained for him the tutorship to the young marquis. These explanations will facilitate the understanding of the ensuing dialogue.

"And so the young man," said Mombrun, "thinks the time is out of joint, does he? What strange perversity! With eighty thousand a year, and a dukedom in expectancy, one would imagine life might be endurable. I venture to say I could practice the sweet virtue of contentment for half the salary. What's his ailment, think you?"

"I am neither his physician nor his confessor," said Mr. Seabright, "but they do say he has a touch of heart complaint."

"Poor fellow!" said Mombrun, gravely; "I know what this is myself."

"Nay, I was speaking figuratively," said the clergyman, with a smile.

"Ah, true! My old friend Miss Mumford hinted at something of the kind. And the lady? The reciprocity is not all on one side, I hope?"

"Indeed I hope it is though," said Mr. Seabright, seriously.

"What!" exclaimed Mombrun, who had his own reasons for being interested in the matter. "You surprise me. I thought you entertained a high opinion of the young marquis."

"So I do: but we all have our failings, Mr. Mombrun; and Lord Northern—but I may be wrong, entirely wrong. I dare say there is no foundation for the report whatever; at all events, it is no affair of mine." And the old gentleman

sipped his port as if he wished to change the subject.

"No business of yours, Mr. Seabright? Well, if a father has no concern in the welfare of his daughter, who has?"

"What has my daughter to do with it? You do not imagine that Helen is in love with the marquis, do you?"

"I would imagine nothing, my dear friend, that could give offence to you: but knowing your affection for the lad, and your long friendship with the duke, I should have thought a match between Miss Helen and his lordship would not have been distasteful to you."

"I do not know that it would," said the clergyman, meditatively. "But I am not aware that there is any such match in contemplation."

"Of course if Miss Seabright refuses to take

pity on Lord Northern, you are right not to encourage him. Perhaps the young lady has some other hero in her eye?" Mr. Mombrun listened for the answer with as much eagerness as if he himself had been a suitor.

"She has said nothing to me of such an one, at all events," replied Mr. Seabright.

"That young Wharton now, whom the duke has taken such a fancy to—what do you think of him? I fancied when I was staying with Miss Lavinia last year that he was very much *epris* with Miss Helen? He's a fine young fellow; a likely lad to take a girl's fancy, I should say." Mombrun seemed quite out of breath at the mention of this Wharton's name.

"Yes, yes; an excellent young man, very. I have a high opinion of Wharton; so has the duke, so has Helen, for the matter of that. They are

old friends, you know; old friends—nothing more. Why, Wharton was brought up by Miss Lavinia, lived at Longthorpe altogether as a boy, was as intimate with Nelly in those days as Northern, pretty near."

"Different kind of intimacy, rather," said Mombrun. "Wharton is five or six years older than Miss Helen. Northern and your daughter are more of an age."

"True," mused Mr. Seabright. "But they have not seen much of each other of late years; not at any rate until the duke took to employing Wharton on the estate."

"Intimacy and love do not always go together," said Mombrun. "The more there is left to imagination, the stronger the passion, very often."

"If they are to grow the fonder the less they meet, the converse should be also true," says the

other, laughing; "in which case we must hope they will keep apart for ever. Thank ye, thank ye, no more wine. The exhalations of that sparkling Ambrosia have already mounted too high. Very unaccountable this relation between spirit alcoholic and spirit immaterial, is it not? this translation, so to speak, of a natural essence into essence transcendental. What is your theory about these problems, Mombrun? How is it that wine becomes emotion, fills the heart with tenderness, and converts dullness into wit?"

"Or the reverse," suggested his companion.

"Ay, or the reverse. For the excess of it makes demons instead of angels."

Mombrun was somewhat perplexed by this sudden turn of his friend's thoughts. His own were occupied with another problem, the payment of the bill. Besides which he was thinking

whether it would not be advisable to provide against a similar difficulty by obtaining a loan from Mr. Seabright before he parted. He determined to leave the metaphysical gauntlet where it lay.

"Ah!" said he, with a sigh: "The sceptical reply which ignorance whispers to such questions often fills me with dismay. What, I have asked myself, would become of the primate's soul, for instance, if his grace took three-pennyworth too much of gin?"

"Surely," cried the clergyman, warming with the prospect of an argument, "when you speak of the soul, you would not confound man's spiritual being with the mere principle of his animal life? You do not mean to tell me——"

"Nay, nay, my dear sir, you misapprehend me altogether. In these speculations you and I are

entirely at one. I will answer for it, no two men, —excuse me, will you ring for coffee?—no two men more thoroughly agree upon all points which have a religious bearing than you and I. You remember my reply to Miss Nelly when she twitted me for not going to church one Sunday morning? 'Pray, what creed do you profess?' said she, in her pretty bantering way. 'Ask your father, my love, what he believes,' said I; 'his answer will serve for mine.' 'I know my dear papa's faith, Mr. Mombrun,' said she, very sweetly, 'his creed is love.' 'And so is mine,' cried I; 'and if you but preach the doctrine there will never be a heretic.' Ah! Mr. Seabright," sighed the speaker, "what an exquisite young creature that is! Was ever a man so blest as you with the choicest gifts of heaven?"

"I have much to be thankful for," returned

the clergyman, devoutly; "and my little Nell is by no means the least treasure kind Heaven has lent me."

"Yes," mused Mombrun, "you of all men ought to be happy. When I think what that child is to you, when I think how lavishly Providence has endowed you, and above all, when I reflect on your unlimited power of doing good —surely the most precious of gifts; I feel, my dear Seabright, in comparing your lot with mine," —Mr. Mombrun paused dramatically, to remove an imaginary tear from his left eye—"yes, with my own, I feel then what a forlorn and hopeless wretch I am."

"Do not say so, my good sir," exclaimed Mr. Seabright, warmly returning the pressure of the other's hand. "My lot is indeed one for which I cannot be sufficiently grateful; but

what cause have you to speak thus disparagingly of your own?"

"Cause?" returned Mombrun with a bitter smile; "do not ask me, sir. In truth, I have no right to answer such a question. What claim have I upon the generosity of one whose heart is ever too ready to overflow with compassion—with more than compassion—with substantial aid to the suffering and the needy! No, Mr. Seabright, do not press me to speak of my misfortunes: I must not, indeed I must not, appeal to you."

"But, my good friend, to whom should you appeal, if not to me? It is my duty as a clergyman, as a Christian, to afford you every consolation in my power. And if my sympathy, or,—or, forgive me for saying so—my purse can avail in the matter, you know what pleasure it gives me to offer it."

Mombrun's mental conflict was evidently severe, and his friend was much affected by it.

"Generous man!" the former presently exclaimed. "Yes, it is more blessed to give than to receive. Yours shall that greater blessing be. I *will* accept this loan. I will confide in you, and acquaint you with my great misfortune." The speaker finished his coffee, and then proceeded. "A near and dear relation—the nearest I possess—married a worthless wretch, who has brought her to the verge of starvation. Believe me, sir, while we sit feasting here, this woman, to my certain knowledge, is without a crust to gnaw. Every day for weeks past this poor soul has sought from me the maintenance for herself and children—with which it is her husband's duty to provide her. What could I do but give—give and give—until my purse was drained? Mr.

Seabright, I love this woman (a sob)—have the best of reasons to love her. But, believe me, I have not one shilling left to save her from the workhouse."

We may mention casually that Mombrun was speaking of his wife.

"Then, thank God!" cried the worthy parson, "I have. Where is this unfortunate creature? Why do we sit here wasting precious moments, when the poor thing may be sinking for want of present comfort."

"Ah, sir, she is too used to waiting. No need for you to witness her distress: I will be the bearer of your alms. This purse—what wealth to her! I will seek her this instant, and place it in her hands. And she shall learn to remember in her prayers a name that many have blessed before her."

Mr. Mombrun buttoned the pocket-book within his coat; took his hat and stick, and reached his hand across the table to his friend.

"And yourself, Mombrun? you must not forget yourself," said the clergyman rising to accept the proffered grasp.

"Thank you! a thousand times thank you," sobbed Mombrun. "When I have soothed her misery, it will be time to think upon my own."

"You know where to find a friend in need."

"A friend indeed!" replied the other, and was gone.

Mr. Seabright sat nearly half an hour meditating on the various forms of misery which during his one day in London he had become acquainted with. He thought also of that home of which Mombrun had so pathetically reminded him. He thought of his darling Helen; and wondered

whether she would marry the Marquis of Northern, or Mr. Wharton, or one of his curates, or a certain colonel in the guards, or any one of the numerous suitors who aspired to her hand, or coveted her fortune. Fortune reminded him of his day's investments; and he was in the act of reflecting on the many drawbacks attending wealth, when the waiter, with a profound obeisance, laid the bill before him.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Seabright remembered that he was without a shilling. In the enthusiasm of his sympathy he had thrust his purse into the hands of Mombrun and had not reserved a penny for himself. Yes, a penny he had; there were a few halfpence in his great-coat pocket. He never walked the streets of London without a supply of such coins; for though contrary to his principles to give promiscuously, he was unable to refuse a beggar. His wife often reproved him for his indiscriminate charity; and assured him that most of those to whom he gave were professional mendicants. He

used to say, "I admit the error of my ways. But after all, the trade is a mighty hard one, and the penny dearly earned." Halfpence, however, would not pay the bill. And Mr. Seabright, with more levity in his manner than the seriousness of the case demanded, ingenuously acquainted the obsequious attendant with the fact of his impecuniosity. The waiter surveyed the clergyman with the sort of scrutiny which a geologist bestows upon a *helix* or a *paludina*, when in doubt whether to refer his specimen to the Cainozoic or Mesozoic periods. Was his specimen an archbishop or a swindler? The stout party who had absconded had been summarily classified by the observant waiter on his first appearance. About him there could be no question. Besides, Mombrun had dined at Browser's before to-day; and the attendant knew him to be, what he termed an "eighteen-penny

touch;" thereby signifying this was the usual extent of that customer's expenditure. It was improbable therefore, *a priori*, that the friend of such an one should be an archbishop. The disappearance of Mombrun was also an element in the calculation. Now, although Mr. Seabright was from every point of view the direct opposite of his recent companion, the waiter had had ere this several experiences of disreputable characters pretending to be clerical gentlemen, and knowing nothing of the fallacies of simple enumeration jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Seabright belonged to the genus impostor. He hesitated however to express this opinion, and sceptically replied, "Perhaps his lordship would be good enough to send for some," meaning money.

"Well," said Mr. Seabright, "I am afraid I cannot do that, for all I had was in the purse which

my friend has inadvertently taken with him. But why do you persist in calling me 'my lord'?"

"Are you not the archbishop, then?"

"No, certainly not," laughed the worthy man, "nor ever shall be."

"Then who the devil are you?" cries the waiter, confirmed in his worst suspicions.

"Why, a gentleman, I hope," replies the clergyman, with provoking good humour. "And if you will not trust me, send to my lodgings, and you will find that I speak the truth."

"A likely story!" cries the waiter. "Why I'm blest if you 'aven't had a dinner fit for a lord—two bottles o' iced champagne, pint of brown India, pint 'o' old port, and winds up with two coffees and a brandy! Pretty archbishop, indeed! I'll soon let you know what's what."

"My good man," cried Mr. Seabright, burst-

ing into a roar of laughter, "you do not suppose I am going to run away without paying?"

"No," says the waiter, "you're a downy old cove, I dessay; but I'll take precious care you don't come that game over me." And beckoning to another oleaginous young man with a napkin under his arm, he requested his mate to summon the proprietor without loss of time.

It is probable that a few words with Mr. Browser would soon have set matters straight; unfortunately the landlord had just stepped out; and in his absence the case was referred to the head waiter, who referred it to the accountant, who speedily left his high stool in the bar and proceeded with the pomposity of a man in authority to pass sentence on the culprit. Luckily this functionary prided himself on the urbanity of his manners. When confronted with Mr. Sea-

bright he felt sure that the party was respectable; and of course if he had forgotten his purse——

"But, my good friend," broke in Mr. Seabright, "I did not forget my purse, I assure you; I came here with money enough to pay for a dozen dinners."

"Gammon!" says the waiter.

"Silence!" says the accountant. "Hear what the gentleman has to say."

Whereupon Mr. Seabright explained his situation, and begged the accountant to verify his statements by immediate reference to the proper quarter.

"Well, sir," said the man, "it is easy to do that. Meanwhile perhaps you would not object to take a seat in the bar."

Mr. Seabright had no objection whatever to

this proposal; especially as the room was warm and comfortable. And being satisfied that either bail or ransom would soon arrive, spent the interim very agreeably in playing with a kitten, which happened to be toasting itself in front of the cozy fire. In due course of time the messenger returned. But what was our friend's amazement, when it was announced that "no such person was known at that address!"

"Not known?" says he, flinging the kitten into the fender with surprise and indignation. "Stuff and nonsense! I warrant me the fellow has never been near the place."

"Feller!" cries the messenger; "who do you call feller? A man as comes here on a reg'lar plant to get his dinner for nothing! I'd feed you for nothing, and clothe you for nothing too, you hold 'umbug."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Mr. Seabright, beginning to be irritated at what he now regarded as want of truth, that you have been to No. —— in —— Street, and told them I was here?"

"No," said the man, "I don't mean to say nothing of the kind, nor that's not the place as you put down on this year paper."

"Why bless me!" exclaimed the clergyman, "that is the direction of my wife's corn-doctor; I must have torn the wrong leaf from my note-book. I am very sorry to have given so much trouble. Here is the address I wrote. If you send thither, you will find——"

"Really, sir," said the accountant, "we cannot keep sending all over London in this way. And I must say it looks very like an attempt to——"

The rest of this sentence was cut short by an

authoritative voice at the door of the bar, calling out,—

"Where's Browser? Send Mr. Browser here directly, waiter."

"Why surely," exclaimed Mr. Seabright, "that is my friend Colonel Froth's voice." And stepping out, he found the gentleman he had named, with a handsome lady on his arm, richly attired in evening costume.

Sir Percy Froth—the colonel had lately succeeded to his father, for whom he was now in deep mourning—seemed quite overcome by the unexpectedness of the meeting. His pale and haggard cheeks were suddenly suffused with colour; and he declared, with evident veracity, that Mr. Seabright was the last person in the world he would have thought of finding in such a place.

The clergyman assured Sir Percy that he could

not have arrived at a more opportune moment; and began to relate the circumstances of his embarrassing predicament. "But," said he, checking himself, "I must not keep this lady standing in the draught. If you are here to dine, pray walk in. I will give myself the pleasure of joining you."

Sir Percy explained that he had ordered a private room; and, finding no option, begged Mr. Seabright to make one of the party. "And permit me," said he, "to introduce you to my cousin Mrs. Mountjoy."

The reverend gentleman, who was all politeness, graciously acknowledged the introduction; but for some reason or other the lady's fancy was so tickled, that she burst out laughing in his face. This behaviour on the part of his cousin caused the baronet much annoyance.

Mr. Seabright, however, did not appear to notice it, but resumed the account of his adventures.

"Well," said the colonel, when he had heard the story, "I cannot tell you how charmed I am to be of service to so valued a friend. The merest accident brought me here, I assure you. The fact is, I happened to call on my—my cousin this afternoon, and found her in despair at the sudden loss of her cook." Here Mrs. Mountjoy turned her head aside, and stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth. "So I proposed," continued Sir Percy, with an anxious and somewhat angry look at the lady, "by way of a little adventure, that we should have a quiet dinner here. I little thought that I should have the good fortune to meet with you. I am only sorry you cannot sit at table with us."

Mr. Seabright also regretted his inability to partake of a second meal. But entreated his

friend to lend him a few pounds to pay for the first.

While the waiter (it may easily be imagined how the tables were turned on the arrival of the baronet, and how servile all the attendants soon were), while the waiter was getting change for a bank note, Sir Percy Froth made many inquiries concerning his friends at Tramways and Longthorpe.

At the mention of Miss Helen's name, Sir Percy's cousin lost some of the confusion which the clergyman's presence seemed to inspire.

"Is Miss 'Ellen and the colonel great friends, sir?" said she.

"Very great friends, ma'am; are you not, Froth?"

"I hope so," says the colonel, modestly; "at all events, Miss Seabright and I are *old* friends. By

the way, I heard a rumour the other day that your daughter was to marry Lord Northern; may I congratulate you?"

"Not yet. I have heard nothing of it myself; what is more, I shall not believe it till I do. She is as happy as her own sweet disposition, and the love of her father and mother can make her; and I see no reason why (for the present whatever) such a lot should not content her."

To this Mrs. Mountjoy replied, if that was his notion of women, she was afraid he would some day discover his mistake.

"As to that, madam," said he, with a smile, "I own nothing is more likely than that I should make mistakes, especially when my surmises refer to the future which is in the hands of an all-wise Providence: but as to my daughter's love to me, thank God! I have no misgivings."

The lady concealed a laugh at the old gentleman's simplicity, and observed, "I suppose, sir, she's very 'andsome."

"It hardly becomes her father to say so," replied Mr. Seabright, with pride. "You must ask Sir Percy, ma'am: he is an excellent judge of beauty, I am sure."

These words were uttered with a vocal inflection, which the lady acknowledged by a flash of her bright eyes.

"Oh, yes, the colonel is a great admirer of female beauty," says she, tossing her handsome head, "and that, wherever he meets it; ain't you, Percy?"

The baronet, who did not appear to relish the conversation, now changed it, by asking Mr. Seabright where he fell in with "that old rogue Mombrun."

"Why employ so harsh a term?" returned the

other. "Mombrun is not a bad sort of man. He has much kindness of heart; and we must not think the worse of him for his poverty. You should hear Miss Mumford sing his praises: and you know what an honest soul she is."

"Poor old lady," said the colonel, "I believe she is more than half in love with the fellow. I've seen as much devotion beaming in her parchmenty face when he was talking to her, as though she were a girl in her teens, and he a youth in his."

"I dare say you have," said Mr. Seabright. "The heart has no wrinkles, as the saying is; love never grows old. She certainly has a great regard for Mombrun, and I know no reason why she should not have. The man has many merits; and who, my dear Froth, has not his faults?"

"Ah, sir, you are very forgiving. If he had

picked *my* pocket, I am afraid I should have born it with less magnanimity."

"Tut, man! he—he took the purse I gave him—took it reluctantly, to help some poor creature whose wants he has impoverished himself by relieving."

"That's his version of the tale, I suppose. Did he say who the 'poor creature' was? Some victim of his own, I'd wager."

"Come, come," remonstrated the clergyman, "we must not pull him to pieces in this way. *Les absents ont toujours tort.* Mombrun has had his trials, no doubt, and allowances must be made for him."

"Yes," said Sir Percy, dryly, "he has had his trials, I believe, and severe ones too. I have heard he was tried for forgery, or something of the kind, once."

"Mombrun? You must be mistaken, Colonel Froth. I have known the man some years, and never heard him charged with such a crime till now. Besides, I cannot think that Miss Mumford, who is integrity itself, would introduce even a dubious character into a family she is so much attached to as the Midlands. 'Twas she who recommended him as tutor; and she would never have done so, had he been dishonest."

"Had she believed in his dishonesty, perhaps not. But certainly my father told me some years ago, when I mentioned my meeting Mombrun at Tramways, that there was something disreputable in his history; I think he said Mombrun was not our friend's real name. I forget all about it now, however. I never met him since, and thought no more about him. Does he often treat you with his society at Longthorpe?"

"He generally comes once a year, or so, on a visit to Miss Mumford. Sometimes the duke asks him for a few days to the castle: he is going there next week, I believe; so he told me at dinner this evening."

"Then I shall have the honour of meeting him; Northern has asked me to go down on Thursday, and shoot the big wood. Do you know what the party is to be?"

"I heard the duchess talking to Mrs. Seabright about it; but do not remember who were asked. The Lanyards I know are to be there, and your young friend Lord St. Kitts."

"The De Crecys?" asked the colonel.

"No; Lord De Crecy is laid up with a sprained leg: he was thrown out of his carriage not long since, and was rather badly hurt."

"Some people would not have cried their eyes

out, had the accident been more serious," said the baronet, significantly.

"I know nothing about that," replied Mr. Seabright, curtly: then addressing a few courteous words to Sir Percy's handsome cousin, and promising to repay the baronet when they met, he politely took his leave.

CHAPTER III.

As Mr. Seabright happened to have a wedding in his parish next day, he left London by the mail that same night. For though he assigned all the funerals to his curate, he never allowed any one to rob him of the pleasure of making people happy; and he would have felt as much uneasiness at missing the marriage ceremony, as he would have felt in being present at a burial.

We also will follow our friend into the country, and make ourselves more intimately acquainted with his family, and with such of his neighbours as our history is concerned in. It has been men-

tioned that the Rev. John Seabright was both patron and incumbent of Longthorpe. He had succeeded to the former dignity on the death of an elder brother; and became at once parson and squire of the parish. The living alone was valued at twelve hundred a year. The annual rental of the family property, which he had inherited soon after the birth of his daughter, was nominally four thousand: so that the Seabrights were wealthy people; and their only child an heiress of some pretensions. The Longthorpe estates, however, were not a little encumbered by the electioneering extravagances of the Rev. John's predecessor. This gentleman had on every possible occasion contested the county, on the conservative side, against the powerful interest of the house of Tramways. And as party politics half a century ago were supported with rather more ardour than

at present, the duke and his nearest neighbour had always been upon terms of the warmest hostility. When Mr. John Seabright came into the property, the relation between the two families was completely changed. John, notwithstanding his cloth, was a staunch liberal. He had been at college with the Duke of Midland. They had made the *grand tour* together; and through life they had kept up the close intimacy of their early friendship.

The freedom of Mr. Seabright's opinions was not confined to affairs of the state; it extended likewise to the doctrines of the church. On this score the bishop of the diocese, and many acquaintances whose good-will be sincerely valued, had thought fit to quarrel with the worthy rector. But though their conduct deeply pained him, it had no effect upon his own. What he believed to

be Truth he preached; and not even his worst enemies had a word to fling at his practice. To be sure, there were some things he did which gave umbrage to a few; but even these were tolerated for the sake of his benevolence; or at worst, set down as marks of eccentricity. He encouraged, for instance, innocent amusement—or what he accounted such—on Sundays. After the hours of divine service he threw open his park gates to the Longthorpe public; and allowed the youth of the town to play at cricket and foot-ball. This at first gave rise to considerable scandal throughout the county; but when it was found that the publichouses were the emptier and the churches the fuller, when people perceived what incalculable good was done by the personal influence of the squire-rector, they became habituated to these innovations, and grew to look upon the

Sabbath, for unusual reasons, as the pleasantest day of the week.

Being provided with a thoroughly efficient agent, the management of his estate in no ways interfered with his duties as pastor. He worked as hard in his parish as did either of his curates; and there was not a poor family in the town but had some reason or other to be grateful for his friendly aid. He had always a pleasant word for everyone; and whatever their stations in life, from his grace at the castle to the humblest labourer about the place, Mr. Seabright treated them with equal courtesy. Sometimes his disregard of appearances brought upon him the censure of those who affected social superiority. Mrs. Coles, the linen-draper's wife, having met Mr. Seabright carrying a beggarly little girl upon his back, declared there was no necessity for the

squire to "bemean" himself in that way. The good woman was doubtless not aware that the child had cut its foot, and was sobbing piteously when the rector found her. Mrs. Griffiths, the solicitor's lady, having passed the rector on the turnpike-road, getting a "lift" in a farmer's cart, in which a couple of pigs were grunting in a net behind him, indignantly protested against his "keeping such company;" but whether she meant the farmer or his pigs, we are not in a position to determine. Even Mr. Seabright's own wife occasionally remonstrated with him for what she regarded as too great familiarity with the "lower classes" of his parishioners. "It was all very well," she said, "so long as he was only the clergyman of the parish; he must recollect now that he was the squire." But as her husband's behaviour was a consequence of his inherent

geniality, and not of his position, there was no possibility of reforming him; and Mrs. Seabright had to put up, not only with the rector's affability to the poor, but, what sometimes vexed her worse, with his want of reverence for the rich.

This lady had a profound respect for her own exalted station; and a proportionably greater admiration for those above her. She had no sympathy with the levelling doctrines of her husband. Herself the daughter of an attorney, she was fully conscious of the difference between Helen's position and her own, as it had been. She never suffered her sister-in-law, or even her own brother, Mr. Griffiths, to forget the wide gulf which her marriage with a Seabright had placed between her former family and her present. The Seabrights, next to the Tramways, were the oldest family in the county. The Seabrights (the present

generation of them, that is) were one and all the most intimate friends the Duke and Duchess of Midland possessed. The Griffithses were frequently invited to the castle balls and fêtes; but there the acquaintance ended. Mrs. Griffiths had exhausted every expedient to persuade Mrs. Seabright to procure an invitation to dine at the castle. Mrs. Seabright was shocked beyond measure at Mrs. Griffiths' presumption: "Only think, Jemima," said she, "what you are asking of me to do! If you lived in society half as much as I, you would know, my dear, that etiquette is the first and the last thing to be considered." The truth is, Mrs. Seabright had other considerations in the background. Such was the hospitality of the duke and duchess, and such their graces' regard for their old friend, that a word from Mr. Seabright would at any time have obtained the desired

honour for the Griffithses: but Mrs. Seabright peremptorily prohibited any such request. She might have braced herself to support the pang of seeing her relatives mixing in society on an equal footing with herself; she might have endured the good-natured raillery of the kind old couple upon her sister-in-law's vulgarity; but there was another member of the great house whose prejudices she was particularly anxious to avoid giving offence to. What would the young Marquis of Northern think (not of *her* relations, but) of Helen's relations? As a Seabright, Helen was a suitable match for any nobleman in the land; as a Griffiths, his lordship, for one, might think the case was different. The discreet mother, therefore, had every inducement to foster the admiration for rank which her own character naturally inclined her to entertain.

This admiration, as we first remarked, was not at all shared by her husband. Many a time did the indifference or forgetfulness of the latter occasion the greatest dismay to his more punctilious spouse. One day (to mention a trifling instance of this neglect) Lord de Crecy drove over from Tinselby to call on the Seabrights; who were sitting down to a two o'clock dinner as the viscount's carriage rattled up to the door. As Lord de Crecy affected far greater state than his grace of Midland—on this occasion he came with four horses and two outriders—Mrs. Seabright, like many others, considered him of more importance, in a fashionable point of view, than the downright and simple-minded old duke. She would not have cared a straw about the latter knowing that she dined in the middle of the day: in summer-time their graces often did the same:

but to be detected, *flagrante delicto*, in such a plebeian act by the very pink of patricians, was mortifying in the last degree. She might have escaped the ignominy by insinuating that the meal was only a lunch; some hint of the kind falling apologetically from her lips, the truthful rector must needs blurt out that it was a *bona fide* dinner. "Although," said he, "had Betsy known that you were coming, she would have provided less stintingly for the occasion." In truth, as Helen chanced to be with Miss Mumford that afternoon, the fare did happen to be somewhat frugal; a single chicken and a tongue was all that graced the board.

Lord de Crecy was hungry, and had timed his drive to fall in with a cut of the parson's mutton; but seeing the scarcity of the land, and being of Mrs. Seabright's mind that etiquette was the most

important consideration in the world, he politely declared that he had no appetite, but would just pick a bit to keep them company. At this moment a messenger arrived with a request for some food for a poor woman in the town, and on learning from the servant that there was nothing in the house which he deemed suitable for a sick person, Mr. Seabright instantly sent her half the chicken, exclaiming at the same, how fortunate it was that Lord de Crecy couldn't eat: there was enough for his wife; and as for himself, he could dine very well on bread and cheese.

Now with all our friend's simplicity of character, he was nevertheless a shrewd, sagacious man. And there was a quiet sense of humour about him which made it difficult to say whether, in cases like the present, he was as artless as he appeared to be. We are inclined to suspect that he

thought Lord de Crecy a humbug; just as the other day in London he drew his own conclusions about that cousin of Sir Percy Froth's, the beautiful Mrs. Mountjoy.

Of this sagacity and fun, however, the rector's wife was quite unconscious. Mrs. Seabright considered that "poor dear John," as she called him, would have been perfectly helpless but for his providential union with herself. "In the ways of the world," she used to say, "he was a perfect child:" her meaning was, "a perfect fool." That he would remit to his smaller tenants their arrears of rent, that he would make any improvements which they requested, that he would give away more to poor relations than he spent on his own household, were proofs enough of his deficiency. These things, however, she could pardon. But that he would not plot and scheme with her

to marry their Helen to the marquis, that he positively preferred a man like Wharton, a professional engineer—a nobody; and, worse than all, was actually for letting things take their course, as though forsooth it were of no consequence whom his daughter married—was too bad! In her estimation such conduct was a sign of imbecility.

There was no such want of energy, such feebleness of intellect, about her. Mrs. Seabright was a bustling, managing, chattering, robustious, little woman. She had been pretty, and retained, superficially, the ascendancy which her personal charms had from the first conferred upon her. That this ascendancy was only apparent, her husband never allowed her to discover. But it speaks volumes for his tact, when we say that he always carried his point in matters of importance; yet had lived

five-and-twenty years with his wife without a single quarrel.

The great bond between them was their daughter. They had also had one son, a fine promising youth, in whom Mr. Seabright had centred a thousand bright hopes for the future. The boy was so apt that he learnt without the least trouble; and already the fond father beheld in the child the companion and friend of after years. His end was the more melancholy, in that it resulted from the boy's own heroism. His sister's dog fell into a pond; the lad jumped in to save it, and was drowned. For many years the father groaned in secret over this loss: but by degrees Helen filled the gap in his affections. Unfortunately the partiality he had both felt and shown for the son, was not without its influence on the daughter. The child discerned by instinct

that her brother was her father's pet. And after her brother's death the same instincts told her that she was so associated with the tragedy, that without any fault of her own she was less cherished than before. In this way it came to pass, as the girl grew up, there was a want (not of love) but of that playful familiarity between the parent and child which removes all consciousness from the desire to please, and banishes any feeling approaching to restraint—the existence of which is incompatible with perfect confidence. Nor did perfect confidence exist between Miss Helen and either of her parents. For while the accident here related hindered it in the case of her father, I fear this young lady had too clear an insight into her mother's character to admit of that respect which the relationship should naturally inspire. Mrs. Seabright was perpetu-

ally reminding her daughter of the gentle blood which she—Helen—inherited from a long line of ancestry; building thereon arguments against marriage with curates, younger sons, professional men (especially engineers), and the like. She also expatiated with eloquence upon the nobility, and the obvious advantages of connection with the same, until her daughter, who really was half Seabright, and had some respect for herself and her position, began to perceive an element in her mother's composition, which in any other person's she would have heartily despised.

That Miss Helen's mama had other foibles—that she endeavoured by meretricious arts to appear still young and beautiful, that she generally wore light pink or sky-blue gloves, talked of 'riding' in a carriage, called her ribands 'ribbins,' and was occasionally ambiguous with

her H's, did not escape the daughter's notice. And as the girl herself lived always in polished society, she could not resist the inferences which these and similar violations of its precepts forced upon her.

CHAPTER IV.

With these outlines of the Seabright family we may now translate ourselves to Castle Tramways. And as the person who took the most active part in Lord Northern's affairs—in which we are directly concerned—was his sister, we shall say a word or two about the young marquis, and then turn our attention to Lady Selina.

At the date of our story, the Marquis of Northern—the Duke of Midland's only son—was about three and twenty, a year or two older than Miss Seabright, and at least ten years younger than his sister. Outwardly he was everything

that we are accustomed to look for in the hero of a novel, or the prince of a fairy tale; whether in other respects he was equally suited to the romantic standard, remains in due course to be seen.

In the allusions already made to this young nobleman, both Sir Percy Froth and Mr. Mombrun stated that rumour had given him in marriage to Miss Seabright. That young lady's father not only denied the report, but hinted to Mombrun that his lordship had formed some attachment, or was supposed to have done so, of which he (Mr. Seabright) could not approve. Be this as it may, it would have been impossible to spend a day at Tramways Castle, in the company of Lady Selina and the Duchess of Midland, and not discover that both these ladies were extremely anxious for a match between Lord Northern and Miss Helen; more than this, that there was some

powerful motive, understood though not expressed, which induced the mother and sister to co-operate with Mrs. Seabright towards the accomplishment of this end.

Owing to the perfect intimacy between the two families, let alone the propinquity of their estates, Helen Seabright and Lord Northern had been brought up like brother and sister; and, excepting in the mind of Helen's mama, probably no thought had ever been entertained, until the last two years, of any closer alliance between them. For more than a twelvemonth the marquis had been out of England: but for some little time before his travels, and now again since his return, Lady Selina especially, and the duchess in a milder way, had combined with Mrs. Seabright to bring about the marriage. As usually happens in such cases, these ladies had done every-

thing in their power best calculated to prevent it. At any rate, this result was certain—the young people, who had never in their lives had any reason for avoiding each other, could not meet now without being aware that they had been brought together for the purpose of *making* love. As a rule, *nascitur non fit* is no less true of this than of the poet's art. How far it was applicable in the present instance is more than we can yet divulge.

But what was it made Lady Selina Tramways so eager for her brother's marriage? The question can only be answered satisfactorily by a general survey of the lady's character: in her case, as in every other, this was more or less the outcome of her career. Let us begin at once by stating that in the bestowal of her own affections, Lady Selina had been far from fortunate. Now, there can be no more laudable trait than the disposition

to assist others to obtain that happiness which we ourselves have missed. But there was something beyond amiability, or even sisterly affection, in Lady Selina's motives. Misfortune had embittered, some would say soured, her ladyship's temper; but if the light-heartedness of her youth was gone, that fleeting possession was now replaced by the enduring consolation of her piety. Lady Selina Tramways had more than a worldly interest in her brother's welfare, and this interest was mainly due to piety.

We shall presently favour the reader with some extracts from this young lady's private journal. It will then be seen how her own matrimonial schemes had miscarried; and how these misfortunes gave her that serious bias, to which her present line of conduct may be ascribed.

By a combination of untoward accidents she

had missed the wide field for her energies, which she had once hoped to find in that complex mode of existence—the marriage state. It was but natural therefore that she should seek some other sphere for her utility; and, failing to discover it, that she should pine under that formidable and well-known malady called *ennui*. Lady Selina yearned to do good with the most sentimental sincerity; and such was the flight of her ambition, that all the trifling duties near at hand seemed quite unworthy of her notice. She had no "calling" for visiting the Longthorpe poor; but she had extensive projects of "walking" the London hospitals. She was sure she could do no good by ministering to the sick; but she nurtured visions of a religious sect, of which she herself was to be the foundress. The prejudice and narrow-mindedness of the world with respect to such enterprises, chilled and

disgusted her noble enthusiasm; and her imprisoned zeal and activity, baulked of their proper ends, had finally to expend themselves in the humble and harmless pursuits of collecting postage stamps, monograms, and autographs. As she did not restrict herself to celebrity, her success in this last-mentioned department of science was unlimited. Besides these things, Lady Selina kept an album in which only her more talented acquaintances were invited to inscribe their poetic effusions, or display their talent in art. Here were to be read many a stanza subscribed with the modest initials S. T. Here also were many sweet things in coloured chalks of moonlit seas and ivy-mantled towers. But above all other objects of interest to herself was her diary. For nearly fifteen years had this valuable record of her "inner life" been preserved without a break. And, judging

by the extracts we are about to give, there is no room for doubt that the record was a faithful one.

Ah! these diaries. What millions of them are yearly written! And when writers dip their pens into their hearts, the pages needs must glow.

What hours had been spent over those mysterious manuscripts of Lady Selina's. What confessions they contained! What relief and satisfaction for the troubled hour! and how vapid and inane to look back upon! In her case certainly, I fancy, the pleasures of reperusal were alloyed by more than the usual discrepancy between expectation and fulfilment. Not that the bulk of her journals exhibited any great exuberance of spirits; for, alas! here, as in most subjective compositions of the kind, the plaintive mood predominated. Only in the

very early volumes was there anything like genuine cheerfulness; and wherever this tone manifested itself, the memorial was proportionally scanty. But in seasons of depression and disappointment the writer had evidently revelled, to dissipation, in the luxury of grief. Then, page after page would overflow with bitter reproaches of a heartless and deceitful world, or repinings over an existence *manqué*, and of aspirations blighted; till later on, and by degrees, promises of resignation supervene, and a transference of hopes from the present vale of tears to the repose of the peaceful tomb.

Ah me! to look back from this present to the thoughtless past, as portrayed in those early journals; to compare the pursuits and aims of her life then, with those of her riper years (we have mentioned them above), how

frivolous the former seemed! But why these comments, when the journals themselves are laid before us?

Monday, 12*th*.—Danced three times with Captain Froth; also danced every dance. How I *do* love balls! F. told me I was a duck. What impudence the man has, and yet one can't help —— him! What a contrast between F. and poor G.! The latter is *so* devoted, he has not a word to say for himself, and consequently looks a G-oose! Mum (mama, probably) says he, *i.e.* the captain, is a *mauvais sujet*, and I'm not to dance with him more than twice the same night. Bore! for he certainly valses best of all my partners; and as to his looks——"

"*Friday*.—To the opera. Captain F. very attentive, I don't think Mum much liked his stopping all night in our box. But he was *so* agreeable.

I'm afraid I heard very little of Bellini's new opera, 'La Sonambula,' though certainly Pasta was charming in the last scene. What fun F. made about it—only fearfully improper!

"*July* 10*th*.—So here's an end of season No 1. Exactly ninety-six balls, exclusive of routs, etc. How frightfully slow Tramways will be! I shall have nothing to do but twiddle my thumbs till next year. How I wish it was next Easter! Poor F.! I wonder if he's very low at parting. What a pity he is so badly off! Why ain't all handsome men rich? I told him I found out from Mum that my fortune was only £15,000 a year. He declares the £15,000 must be my *capital*. What did he mean by capital, I wonder? anyhow, he was horridly low and cross at it. He said he owed nearly as much to his tailor. I am afraid (if this is true) F. must be rather extravagant.

. . . How well he looked at the drawing-room as officer of the guard! I wonder if he will say *anything* to me when he comes to Tramways.

"*Castle Tramways, Sept.*—Well! wonders will never cease. Mum told me yesterday—I can hardly write for laughing—that that old donkey Lord de Crecy wants to make up to *me*. He must be a hundred at least. If he asks me, I shall quote the Prayer Book, and tell him a woman can't marry her grandfather. I thought it great impertinence of H. making me an offer; for he is certainly thirty if he is a day. But as to that old man, what next?"

Passing over this stage of Lady Selina's life (the passages describing it have been selected at random), we come to a period, a few years later, when the thoughtlessness of youth has already

given place to a staid and sober recognition of the vanity of mere worldly pleasures.

"*Tuesday, May 1st.*—A new month, or rather a new year. What will it bring? Repetition! How wearisome this eternal treadmill of balls. How thoroughly I enter into those beautiful lines of dear Lord B.

> 'As some lone bird without a mate
> My weary heart is desolate;
> I look around, and cannot trace
> One friendly smile or welcome face,
> And ev'n in crowds am still alone,
> Because I cannot love but one.'

"I have counted for nearly a whole week (it is five days since we met) on last night's meeting. And it is over! *How soon is passed what has long been yearned for!* And what am I to think now? Our eyes meet athwart the gay and heartless throng. And what are others to us? what is all that gay and idle crowd to the heart that beats

for *one* and *one* only? . . . He certainly looked paler than usual. Methought his arm trembled as he led me up to our place in the lancers. The lancers! why did he ask me for the lancers? A quadrille or a valse would have given fifty times better opportunity for him to speak. To speak! Does he mean to speak? I shall know to-night. He dines with the B.'s; and there I shall meet him. Heigho! It wants yet an hour to luncheon. That's seven hours to dinner. What if he should not come? He looked decidedly ill last night. Pooh! foolish heart, be still. Perhaps I may see him walking by the Serpentine. No, he has not been there for a fortnight. Oh for to-morrow!

"*Wednesday.*—All is over! My worst forebodings are verified. I thought it must be so! Why did I ever hope? Fool! fool! There is an end to the *romance* of life. Henceforth welcome

dull, patient endurance. And for how long? Oh! I wish that I were dead! . . . I saw at once by the way W. avoided my looks across the dinner table that everything was at end between us. And shall I confess it? Can I write it, and survive my humiliation? I saw realized the dread suspicion that has so often haunted me. He loves another! and *that* woman, too, of all creatures in existence! that *vulgar, forward, overbearing hussy!* But I will not condescend even to abuse her. And *he?* Had he no other way of telling me his meaning? To return me a flower (which I had purposely dropped in his path)—what an insult to a woman! He might have left it where it lay, or trampled on it, for aught I cared: but to pick it up and give it back to me, was cruel. O Wotherspoon! had you said, 'Selina, you understand me—your flowers are nothing to me,

nor yourself either;' you could not have spoken plainer nor more insultingly."

The catastrophe in the last sentence shows that Lady Selina had about this time not only lost sight of Captain Froth, but was far more seriously engrossed with the above-named Mr. W. In fact, several volumes are taken up with this affair. And though the passage here cited appears to point to a decided climax, we find, long after, repeated allusions to the false "W.," who is sometimes mentioned reproachfully, but more often with tenderness and regret. Between the Froth and the Wotherspoon periods, there are numerous indications of attachments in every stage of development. We notice the last only, because this seems to have been final. Henceforth the connubial project is virtually abandoned: and in its place we find a steadily increasing pietism, from

which her ladyship has never since receded. As this change from frivolity to seriousness must afford delight to all right-minded persons, we shall conclude these extracts with a few selections which cannot fail to edify.

"*Sunday.*—Just home from afternoon church. A lovely discourse from Mr. Howlit. How awful is the truth that in the very cradle the babe is steeped in sin! How fearful the reflection that scarcely one in a million is of the chosen few! . . . This morning, before rising, had much sweet communion with self. Probed my conscience thoroughly; and on searching into its recesses, was truly thankful that it had been subjected in years gone by to the great purifying influence of sorrow. Found renewed sweetness in the perusal of Dr. Mopus' 'Plea for Everlasting Punishment.'

"*20th.*—Have entertained serious thoughts of writing a religious novel. Providence never could have intended woman's sphere of action should be confined within the limits prescribed by the miserable conventionalities of the world. Alas! that I should be so unfitted for some of the Christian offices, which others of my sex are adapted to! District visiting, for instance, is out of my power. The keenness of my susceptibilities to offensive sights and odours utterly incapacitate me for this field of utility. Even the smell of fustian at the Sunday-school is more than I can bear. To think of the invaluable service I might render to those poor children's souls, were it not for the insuperable difficulty attending their nether garments! I have consulted Mr. Howlit on the subject; and hoping for spiritual aid, was disappointed with his advice to smell at vinegar.

He also bade me somewhat rudely to save my *own* soul. How difficult is this task, surrounded, as one is, by this world's pomp and grandeur; and met at every turn by levity and scoffing! But I must do my duty in spite of the world. Would that I could lead others to feel and think as I do! It is so shocking to think of the many benighted ones—in my own family too. I do not speak of my mother; Heaven knows she tends the sick, and works for the needy with the devotion of a saint: but what must I say of my poor father, who is always joking as though life were but a jest; who laughs at Mr. Howlit, and calls him a "sour-faced, canting hypocrite;" and jeers at me when I strive to imitate that righteous man's example? What must my feelings be when I behold my poor father deliberately compose himself to slumber whenever Mr. H. ascends the

pulpit? Yes, deliberately; for he listens most attentively to Mr. Seabright, and this to me is almost as wicked as the other. Of all men, Mr. Seabright is the least fitted (in *my* opinion) for his sacred office. Not but what he is personally a good man, so far as benevolence and that sort of thing goes; but his *orthodoxy* is more than questionable. Indeed, the bishop himself told me that he had frequently remonstrated with Mr. S. about his doctrine. This is undoubted—if Mr. Howlit is right (and who for a moment can question *that?*) then Mr. Seabright is wrong, for the latter holds opinions *diametrically* opposed to dear Mr. H.'s. And then, must not a clergyman be worse than a heretic, who permits all the 'young men in his parish to play at foot-ball and cricket on the Sabbath? He pretends this keeps them from the publichouses and idle gossip. For my

part, I cannot see that there is much to choose between these two modes of profaning the holy day.

"Last, but not least, my dear brother—my poor Northern. How my heart bleeds for you, unhappy boy! Blessed indeed would be my labours, could I save this lost sheep from the bottomless pit. Too well I see whither his steps are going astray. Too well I perceive his soul is entangled in the fatal snares of beauty. And, alas! he is heedless of the voice which warns him of perdition. Oh, if he could be brought to see the error of his ways, ere it is yet too late! But he is impatient of rebuke. And when I disclose to him the anxiety, which my own eyes convince me there is but too much ground for, his ardent and imperious temper answers me with scorn. The path of the righteous is indeed beset with thorns.

But who knows what may be achieved by favourable opportunities, and prayer?"

Thus, like M. Comte's celebrated three phases of human development—the supernatural, the metaphysical, and the positive—we have three distinct phases of Lady Selina's evolution: 1st, The volatile, or dancing period; 2nd, The sentimental or subacid period; 3rd, The theological or rancid period. From this ultimate stage there was in her case no departure. And we shall find her ladyship acting throughout consistently with this conception.

CHAPTER V.

A FEW days after the Seabrights' return to Longthorpe, Lady Selina Tramways, with mind intent upon the secret purpose, of which the reader is now aware, walked over from the castle with an invitation for her friends to dine. The Midlands often invited the Seabrights in this unceremonious way. It was "Come if you have nothing better to do," or "Send dear Helen by herself," or "The duke wants Mr. S. to make up a rubber." On this particular occasion it was doubtful whether the invitation would be accepted; for it happened to be a Saturday, and Mr. Seabright always

stayed at home on that day to compose his sermon. But Lord Northern being just returned, his sister was very anxious (she was naturally of an anxious temperament) to ascertain whether any favourable change had set in since his last meeting with Helen; and determined not to lose a day in bringing them together.

"We really cannot get on without you, my love," said she to Miss Helen. "It is just the first night of a party, before people's angularities are rubbed off, that is so difficult to manage." Lady Selina had a great notion that everything in this world required "managing;" and flattered herself, if she had a gift (not a doubtful point with her) it lay in this particular art. As to her business with Miss Seabright, that required the nicest of handling. It would never do to let dear Helen "see through" her designs. And of course

when people are expected not to see (as in blind man's buff, for instance), we know they never do. Miss Nelly, at all events, pretended not to see; and though delighted at any time, for the mere youthful pleasure of change, to spend an evening at the castle, and especially desirous, for her own private reasons, of going there now, she followed the lead of her elder in the pleasant path of dissimulation, and began to raise all sorts of objections to the offer.

"You may hear," said she, "that I am hoarse as a raven. And mama will never let me go out while this east wind lasts."

"Well, my dear," says her mother, "I think it is much warmer this afternoon; and if you are well wrapped up, it will do you no harm. Her grace will be quite disappointed if you do not go."

"Even if I could," says Miss Helen, "papa

could not take me: it's Saturday, remember. And as to you, mother, it would be madness for you to be out at night with that cold of yours."

"I'm sure your pa' will take you, my love," says the eager mother. "You've only to coax him, and he will do anything you wish."

"But who said that I do wish?" cries the ingenuous young creature; "and if he can't take me, he would not hear of my going alone when there is such a big party. There is a tremendous party, isn't there?"

"None but old friends," said Lady Selina: "the Bishop, Lord St. Kitts, the Lanyards, Sir Percy Froth, and——"

"Is Sir Percy Froth come?" cries Helen. "I'm so glad. He's the best fun in the world."

"I hope," said her ladyship, "Sir Percy is not a particular friend of yours, dear Nelly? He is

not at all the sort of man I should like to see you take to."

"A very fascinating and dangerous man," observes mama, "and by no means well off, I'm told."

"A most objectionable person," returns Lady Selina. "I cannot think why Northern asks him down here. He is the worst possible company for him: so thoroughly unprincipled, and in a state of spiritual blindness perfectly appalling."

"I know nothing about his spiritual blindness," says the irreverent miss, with a laugh. "He's about one of the sharpest hands I ever saw, and the best billiard player, and the best valser in England."

"Billiard player! valser!" groaned Lady Selina; "I am ashamed of you, Helen."

"Oh," says Mrs. Seabright, alarmed lest her

daughter's enthusiasm should be misinterpreted; "Helen don't think seriously of the colonel, of Sir Percy (I beg his pardon), do you my love?"

"How do you know who I think seriously of, mama? I only say Sir Percy is charming, and am very glad he is at Tramways. Well, Selina, tell us who else you've got."

"Nobody else; unless, by the way, you count Miss Lavinia and her *protégé*."

"Indeed, I count Miss Lavinia as more than all your party, the dear old thing! If she is to be there, I think I must make an effort. I've not seen the old woman for an age; and have a thousand things to say to her."

Upon this it was understood that Miss Seabright was to dine at the castle; and directly Lady Selina was gone, she tripped down to her father's study, and began as follows:—

"Papa dear, are you very busy?"

"Is that you, my darling? Yes, I am rather busy. What is it you want?"

"Oh, never mind then; if you wish to get rid of me, I can speak to you by-and-by. Let me see what your sermon is about." And the young lady perches on papa's arm-chair, and winds an arm round the paternal neck.

"If you sit quiet, I will read you a bit of it," kindly proposes the author.

"That would spoil my interest for to-morrow," was the artless reply; "and to-morrow we expect great things, as you will have to preach before the bishop. I hope, dear, you don't mean to shock him too much. Let me look; what's all this about? Hem—hem—'Although I have religiously kept from controversy in the pulpit, deeming practical morality'—hem—hem—'and

Christianity a life rather than a dogma'—hem —hem—' times when '—hem—' painful duty'— hem—' truth at all costs '—' sweep off the altars' —what's this? what's this?"

"Ay, read it up," says the writer; "read out that sentence; begin here,—look."

" ' To oppose the institution which our fathers loved in centuries gone by; to sweep off the altar, forms and usages that ministered to our mother's piety, helped her bear her bitter ills and cross of life, and gave her winged tranquillity in the hour of death; to sunder your ties of social sympathy; destroy the rites associated with aspiring dreams of childhood, and its earliest prayer and the sunny days of youth—to disturb these because they weave chains invisible but despotic, which bind the arm, and fetter the foot, and confine the heart; to hew down the hoary tree under whose

shadow the nations played their game of life, and found in death the clod of the valley sweet to their weary bosom—to destroy all this because it poisons the air, and stifles the breath of the world—it is a sad and a bitter thing; it makes the heart throb; and the face that is hard as iron all over in public, weeps in private weak woman's tears.' "

"Is not that grand?" interrupted Mr. Seabright.

"Well, that does sound beautiful; I can't think how you can write such fine things, you dear clever papa. (*A kiss.*) But I wonder what the bishop would think of it."

"It *is* beautiful," said her father, with tears in his eyes; "it is beautiful, whatever the bishop may think of it. But those eloquent words are not mine: they were spoken on the other side of

the Atlantic. I have borrowed them because they speak my thoughts to the bishop better than any language of my own can speak them. But what is it my Nelly wants?" he added after a pause, during which his thoughts had wandered far away from the present scene.

"If you must know, papa, I want you, that is to say, the duke wants you to dine at the castle to-night. Selina has just been here, and says you positively must go."

"To-night, my love? Out of the question. How am I to get through my sermon?"

"Bother the sermon! I'll write your sermon for you. Besides, you don't want all the afternoon."

"I have but an hour," said he. "There are three or four sick people whom I promised to read to. And I hear old Peter Stone is much worse since I went to London."

"But you don't know what the duke may want you for. Something frightfully important, depend upon it. A row on the board of guardians, a meeting in the workhouse, a churchwarden seized with apoplexy. Goodness knows what may have happened. Upon my word, pappy dear, you ought to go, indeed you ought."

Mr. Seabright sighed; he comprehended the position, and saw that it was not to be turned. As it was merely a question of sitting up for a couple of hours after the party, he was not the man to save his own convenience at the cost of his child's. "Be off with you, little tyrant!" said he, laughing. "I suppose for the Duke of Midland's sake I must do what Miss Seabright wishes."

When the clergyman and his daughter were ushered into the drawing-room at Tramways

Castle, the company had already assembled. But it must not be imagined that because Miss Helen was still in her 'teens' she suffered from school-room bashfulness on entering the presence of so many fashionable people, or even at the more embarrassing conviction that she had kept them waiting. In no time or place was this young lady disposed to forget the prerogatives of youth, good looks, and great expectations. At Tramways especially she had been accustomed from infancy to carry things with a high hand. She therefore received the affectionate embrace of the motherly duchess and the neat little compliments of the courteous old duke with the utmost complacency; and listened to the unctuous hyperboles of my lord bishop, and the simperings of her father's curate, with equal unconcern.

When dinner was announced, the half-dozen

young men of the party, including the bishop, by-the-by, who was a great admirer of beauty, began to edge their way to the side of the pretty heiress; and notwithstanding the differences in rank which ought to have settled the order of going, no one seemed inclined to go, and leave Miss Helen to the others.

And here let us remark upon the wisdom of our ancestors in establishing by statute the rules to be observed in this important question of precedency. What heart-burnings these wise men (even Mr. Bentham would have admitted their wisdom here) have saved us! What peace and good-will they have preserved amongst men, and amongst women, who, meeting for convivial purposes, might otherwise have become foes for life! Though not belonging to any class which Garter King-at-Arms has hitherto thought fit to men-

tion in the table of precedency, individually I confess to considerable sensitiveness on the point of personal merit. What right, for instance, would that whiskered puppy Dash have to walk out before me, were it not for his hereditary privileges? True, in the paltry matter of appearance, D. may have the best of it. He may be a few inches less round the waist, a few inches longer in the legs; but in intellect—Pshaw! 'tis no question (luckily for D.) of intellect. The jay is decorated in a peacock's plumes. D.'s ancestor was mayor of —— when the King of Blefuscu visited that ancient city. D.'s ancestor became a knight; and D. thenceforth a member of the aristocracy. What rivalry can there be between such men as us?

It is fortunate, I repeat, that we are thus provided with an artifice for polite locomotion, which

saves us treading on each other's corns. However invidious the distinctions, we may still console ourselves with some equivalent to the *"virtus post nummos"* of the clerical wit: and in this sense exclaim, with all the urbanity of Mrs. Malaprop, "Come, sirs, lead the way, and we'll precede."

By rights—according to the conventional and convenient rights here spoken of, Mr. Tartlett the curate had no excuse for offering his arm to Miss Helen when the bishop was offering his. By the same token, Lord St. Kitt's, who was but an earl, should have yielded to the Marquis of Northern; and while a mere baronet ought to have given place to both peers, a civil engineer like Mr. Wharton, or an estate agent like Mr. Terrier, had no pretension to compete at all. But in spite of the law, and in spite of Lady Selina, who had

intended to manage the whole concern according to her notion of the fitness of things, each of these gentlemen seemed bent on possession of the lovely prize; till Lord Northern observing to the bishop how the other ladies were waiting for his arm, the field was left, and Sir Percy soon became the master of it.

When the guests were seated, what spectacle could be brillianter than that displayed before them? How splendid were those gorgeous ranks in white and silver uniform! What symmetry of limb now clad in silk and plush! Behold the dazzling plate so whitely frosted and so brightly varnished, the piles of luxurious fruit, the rare and brilliant flowers; cast your eye around the beautifully proportioned room. Is it not an honour to be seated in such company? A duke, or earl, or baron, in every niche and panel;

grim warriors in their steel; and courtiers in their velvet. Then look at him, the castle's present lord; and say is he not worthy to figure with the best of them? What a picture of a fine old English gentleman! What a handsome man he must have been; and now how venerable and benign!—his snowy hair brushed off his powdered pate, his smooth-shaved cheeks, his neck enveloped in a yard of cambric, his ample shirt-frill—in short, the dress complete of more than half a century ago. The duke is over seventy; and yet you'd think him ten years younger. There's not a winter's morning but he is out and on his farm by seven. Having seen him amongst his equals, and surrounded by the highest in the land, it would surprise you to find this dignified and princely gentleman stripped to his shirt-sleeves, helping his woodmen to fell a tree;

or up to his middle in a ditch, giving practical instructions in the art of draining. Yet this had been his way for fifty years or more. And like his friend the parson he was intimate with everybody: and to the farmers' wives he was no less courteous than to her grace the duchess.

And what was this good lady like? In all respects a worthy mate for him. High-born, high-bred, she had the grandest and most irrelevant ideas about life and its capabilities that ever yet deluded a simple mind. Whether her acquaintances' incomes were reckoned by hundreds or tens of hundreds was equally unknown to her. What the duke had, what she herself had, or anybody in the world had, was not merely doubtful to her from accidental ignorance of people's private affairs; but the whole question of expenditure as related to means was, to her, involved in such

inextricable perplexity and in such unfathomable mystery, that she shrank from its solution, as you or I might from an attempt to comprehend Mr. Babbage's calculating machine, or from any other mental effort equally adapted to the spraining of one's brains. There was one point that she was clear upon: she wished everybody in the world to be happy and comfortable. Was want of money the cause of their discomfort, she sent for Mr. Terrier, the duke's agent, and instructed him to remove it. Had this gentleman attended to one in a hundred of her behests, the ducal estates would no more have sufficed to meet them than it would have paid the national debt. Mr. Terrier usually evaded her grace's orders without any direct reference to impossibility. But if the duchess found the evil still uncured, and learnt moreover that it was incurable, why there was

nothing for it but to sigh and then submit. When Mr. Terrier failed, the next resource was Providence. And the refractory ill was relegated to that large category of irremediable misfortunes, which in her grace's mind were laid aside and docketed "Whatever is, is right."

But the kind lady did not vent her sympathy with all sorts of distress vicariously through Mr. Terrier. Far from it. Dr. Bompas, the medical practitioner, and Mr. Tartlett, the curate, and her old friend Miss Mumford, were perpetually consulted and employed in the service of the poor. And besides this, wherever suffering was to be heard of in the neighbourhood, the Duchess of Midland's humble little pony carriage was seen at the cottage door—her grace in an old poke bonnet and dowdy dress was herself within, laden with substantial comforts for the sick and needy.

It is superfluous to add that where tenderness was so natural the troubles arising from love affairs were sure to meet with special interest. Whatever the station of the unhappy pair, the duchess was overwhelmed with concern about them. If two young people were in love with each other, this was enough for her: every other consideration was of secondary or no importance: *her* business was to unite them. Bless me! how anxiously she would strive to bring about a marriage! And who could doubt that, night and morning, the gentle soul appealed to the Ruler of all events to help in what every dispassionate observer could easily foretell would only end in sorrow. But the sight of suffering she could not endure: and whatever the cost (the future she consigned to a higher care), pain must be assuaged, if the power did but rest with her to soothe it.

With reference to her son, and his alliance with Miss Seabright, it is hard to say what line the duchess would have taken had she been left entirely to herself. Her first care was naturally for Lord Northern's happiness. She knew he was not happy now. She knew that for the last two or three years he had been unhappy; and she saw no way of remedying the evil unless it was by marrying him to Miss Helen. This unfortunately was not the remedy his lordship wished for: but as what he desired was simply an impossibility in his mother's eyes, and as Lady Selina was continually persuading the duchess that Helen was in love with her brother, her grace was forced to behave as if she wished for that which Lady Selina was bent on bringing to pass.

As to Miss Helen's passion for her son, the Duchess of Midland had her doubts about it.

She was quite prepared to believe that the girl did not live who could resist this paragon of manly beauty and moral worth; but she was in the habit of conversing confidentially with that remarkably shrewd person Miss Lavinia Mumford; for whose wisdom and truthfulness she, like every one else acquainted with the old maid, conceived profound respect. Miss Mumford had let fall certain vague misgivings as to the success of Lady Selina's enterprise. In vain the duchess sought to fathom the old maid's reasons. These reasons could only be founded upon a knowledge, real or imaginary, of some one else's secret; and no mortal being had ever wormed a secret out of Miss Lavinia. The duchess knew how useless it was to try; so she accepted Miss Mumford's opinion as though she had listened to an oracle; and only half believed the assertions of her daughter.

Barring the fact that her grace's wishes were inevitably determined by other people's, the collateral question of rectitude would certainly in this case have strongly induced her to concur in the designs of the austere Selina. If she could only have persuaded herself that Helen did care for her son, and could but have detected the faintest inclination on his part towards the girl, the motives for wishing the match were in other respects so very urgent, that she would have been quite as anxious as her daughter for the two to become attached. Whenever the young marquis and Miss Seabright met in her presence, she watched them with the keenest interest. But it was not easy even for her to affirm positively what their conduct really meant. The intimacy between them had been so close that the absence of restraint went for nothing: while the slight

embarrassment which had lately sprung up might indicate either a sense of something beyond their youthful friendship, or, what was nearer the truth, a knowledge that others were manœuvring with them, for purposes of their own.

So far as Lord Northern was concerned, it was well known what obstacle hindered his concession to the scheme: but it was not as yet quite evident that Helen objected to it. The duchess concluded that Miss Mumford's warning implied some preference on the part of Helen. Who then was the hero that opposed her uncontesting son? More than once it occurred to her that the gallant colonel, who some years ago had flirted with Selina, was making up to the Longthorpe heiress. She had known Sir Percy Froth too long to be ignorant of his character. She had often heard the late baronet complain of his son's

prodigality, and with all her ignorance of money matters she had a faint impression that even the largest estates may be encumbered by careful and assiduous waste. What more likely than Froth's desire to supply the deficit in a way so pleasant? But did the heiress favour him? At London balls and parties the duchess had seen them often meet; it was evident that Miss Seabright was flattered and amused by his attentions. And whether owing to the colonel's address or to the young lady's preference, somehow or other it generally happened, as it happened to-night, that others failed where Froth succeeded. The duchess noticed the baronet's success; and she noticed, too, that Miss Seabright seemed quite contented with her lot. Sir Percy was making himself particularly agreeable, and his companion was thoroughly enjoying his society. No one could

tell a story better than Froth; and he was now sending Miss Helen into fits with his description of her father's plight at the tavern in the Strand. "That old rogue Mombrun," said he, "picked his pocket of every penny: and but for my timely rescue your respected parent would have passed the night in Choky."

"He might have settled for the dinner before he went."

"No, no, Mombrun knew your father would not suffer him to pay, and so returned the compliment. It reminds one of the German ballad,

'Speisten in derselben kneipe,
Und da Keiner wollte leiden
Dass der andre für ihn zahle,
Zahlte keiner von den Beiden.'*

* In the self-same beershop dined they;
And as neither was content
That the other paid his reckoning,
Neither ever paid a cent.
Bowring's translation.

By the way, do you think his reverence will ever refund that little loan of mine?"

"He hasn't paid you? How shocking! But I'll remind him directly after dinner."

"Pray do no such thing; I'm only laughing. 'Tis only a paltry fiver. I should be delighted to pay ten times as much to serve Miss Seabright's papa at any time. Besides, you know, I am no longer in danger of the workhouse now. What a blessing it is fathers don't live for ever, ain't it?"

"For shame! I believe you haven't a particle of feeling for anything or anybody."

"What! if you prick me, do I not bleed? If you tickle me, do I not laugh? I assure you my senses, affections, passions, are strong enough; especially in presence of the object that they covet." Sir Percy's looks were no less pointed than his words.

Miss Helen blushed, and changed the subject. "Don't you think Miss Lanyard very good-looking?" said she.

"When one sits in sunshine, one cannot see the stars," replied the flattering colonel; "but Mr. Terrier thinks she is. What will you bet he doesn't make her an offer before we leave the room?"

"Nonsense! they never met before."

"Do you not believe in love at first sight then? Besides, Terrier is inflammable. I hear he has proposed to six widows and nine spinsters since I was last here. Tell me in confidence how many times has he threatened to terminate his miserable existence on your account?"

"Mine!" Do you imagine I would allow the poor man to make such a fool of himself?"

"Hem! A fool. So that is what you would call the man who dared confess his love to you?"

"Well, him, certainly."

"But not every man?"

"Yes, every man who had as little right to do it as he."

"What constitutes the right?"

"Encouragement, I suppose."

"Give me some: I want to see what it's like."

"I dont think *you* want encouraging. And if a man doesn't know when he is encouraged, and when he is not, no woman can save him from his folly."

"Ah! you women are sphinxes; you make simpletons of us all. Look at poor Northern over the way, what a simpleton he looks, doesn't he?"

"He looks rather bored, if that's what you mean."

"What makes him so low? I never saw a

man with such a hang-dog air. He has been like that ever so long."

"Has he? I haven't noticed it. He is always jolly enough when he is here. In fact, he brightens us all up when he comes."

"Then I suppose *you* miss him when he goes?"

"Naturally. He is the oldest friend I have—man friend, that is. We were always like brother and sister, you know; and when he is away, the old people live more by themselves; and one doesn't see half so much of the castle."

"By the way, that other surly-looking individual is down here a good deal now, is he not? He, I mean, on the further side of Miss Mumford. Mr. Chose—Walters, what's his name?"

"Mr. Wharton, you mean. Why do you call him surly?"

"Well, he looks a sort of gentleman to jump

down your throat, if you open your mouth in his presence, a conceited beggar."

"He has not a bad opinion of himself, I dare say," says the young lady, struggling to draw on her glove. "But as he is reckoned the most rising engineer of the day, he has a right to think as others do."

"Are you one of the others?"

"That's bad grammar, I believe."

"But good sense."

"If it is good sense, I had better own it. I do think him both clever and agreeable."

"Indeed! appearances are so deceptive. He looks such a lout, one would never give him credit for an idea beyond bricks and mortar."

"That proves your dulness, not his."

"Ha, ha, dulness! you warm with your subject. If I had but guessed——" The remainder

of the sentence was lost in the general commotion. The ladies rose and left the room.

The generation to which the Duke of Midland belonged had never learnt to substitute the stimulus of nicotine for that of alcohol. The companions of his grace's younger days were not addicted to tobacco. They drank their magnum or two of loaded claret after dinner; and instead of joining the sensitive creatures awaiting them in the drawing-room reeking with the stale odours of a pot-house, they were nearly befuddled; and (if able to utter) edified the delicate ears of their fair ones with such fervid truths as the bottle only can inspire.

When the ladies retired, it was the custom here, *i.e.* in winter time, for the gentlemen to arrange themselves around a horse-shoe table placed before the cheerful fire. And as the wine,

which was of the best, passed gaily round, the geniality of the noble old host rose at this hour to its height. The memory of his early days were what he took most pleasure in recalling. He had a fund of anecdote about the adventures of his youth; and about the celebrated men who were constant inmates of the castle when his father was alive. He had many a tale to tell of Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan; both of whom were fond of sport, and used to spend a portion of the shooting season yearly at the castle. His father, the late duke, would often send him out in charge of these distinguished statesmen; and he well remembered the great minister boasting with a schoolboy's rapture of a new kind of fowling-piece with two barrels, invented by one Joseph Manton. In those days (he told them) these sportsmen were delighted if they bagged three or

four brace of birds apiece. Not that partridges were much scarcer then than now; but the truth was, men shot indifferently with flint and steel; and as they went out every day, not to make a bag, but for a few hours' recreation after post was answered, or when they had done franking letters, why, they took it easy at farmhouses; where Mr. Sheridan, if he got a chance, would refresh himself at noon with a bottle of the farmer's port, or failing this, with a tankard or so of foaming ale. On one occasion the spirit got into the navy treasurer's eyes; and in the very first turnip field they entered after luncheon, Mr. Sheridan inadvertently peppered Mr. Fox on the broadest part of that stout gentleman's person. And the great minister had actually to be carried home reposing at the bottom of a muck-cart. Mr. Fox, according to the Duke of Mid-

land, was a special favourite with the Tramway tenants. When on these shooting expeditions, if he chanced to meet the farmer, they would sit together on a gate or beneath a fence, and converse by the hour on crops, and cattle, and breeding, and the price of corn. And as to the women, the narrator said "there wasn't a pretty wench on the estate that Master Charley hadn't chucked under the chin, or given a smacking buss to."

Sometimes his grace had a good story to tell about himself. He used frequently to recount an incident that befell him in consequence of his practice, before alluded to, of assisting at his labourers' work. "One day," said he, "my friend De Crecy brought a little Frenchman, a certain Marquis de Sansliard, to see the castle, and call upon the duchess. As usual, De Crecy, who as we all know is fond of cutting a dash, came

over in state with his four horses, outriders, and all the rest of it. Scarcely had they passed through Longthorpe when a crowd of children, delighted with my lord's imposing retinue, began yelling and hooraying with such glee that the leaders took fright, bolted off, upset the carriage, and landed the two noblemen in a ditch. Lord de Crecy was much bruised, and returned at once to Tinselby. But the gallant marquis, though somewhat disfigured by mud and scratches, resolved, now that he had got so far, to borrow a horse from one of the outriders, and pursue his journey to the castle. "You may imagine my surprise," said the duke, "when the little Frenchman, mounted on the tall coach horse, trotted up to me, and asked the road to Tramways. He evidently mistook me for one of my ditchers. 'Tell me, *mon vieux*,' said he, 'which is the path

to the château.' 'Are you from Lord de Crecy's?' said I, recognizing the arms upon the horse's blinkers. 'Yes,' says the little man, pompously, 'I am the Marquis de Sansliard; and wish to visit your duke, and his *palais*.' 'Follow me,' said I, 'and I will show you the way.' When we reached the castle, I held his horse while he dismounted. He then put a sixpence into my hand, and thanking me with infinite condescension, bade me lead the animal to the stables. I was in hopes," said his grace, with characteristic kindness, "that monsieur would not find me out; so I touched my hat and speedily obeyed him. However, either the servants had told him, or else my change of dress did not disguise me, for when I met him in the drawing-room the poor man burst into a thousand 'Mon Dieu!'s and 'Monseigneur's, and

made so many grimaces that I thought he or I would have a fit."

In this pleasant and harmless fashion the old gentleman would entertain his guests. And if his stories were a little long-winded (I am sorry to say that Mr. Seabright, who had heard this one several times, was loudly snoring at the present moment), still they were so good-humoured, and so guileless, that they offended none. And when the anecdote wanted point, the simplicity of the narrator was itself a source of pleasure.

CHAPTER VI.

THE party in the drawing-room was arrayed in such groups as accident or natural selection had determined. The duchess and Miss Mumford were whispering confidentially on a sofa. But it was not easy to converse about the private affairs of those who were close at hand, for the simple reason that Miss Lavinia was extremely deaf; in addition to which the duchess had a soft and inarticulate way of muttering, which made her voice almost inaudible to any ears. The caution of Miss Mumford was another hindrance to her grace's curiosity. So that nothing of importance could at present

pass between them. Mr. Terrier was still pursuing his attentions to Miss Lanyard, and was entreating her to sing "that little thing, don't you know?" which for the life of him he could not put a name to. Lady Selina was engaged in controversy with Mr. Tartlet upon Dr. Mopus' charming new work, "The Wrath to Come;" at the same time, however, she contrived to keep an eye upon Sir Percy Froth and Lord St. Kitts, whom she feared might interrupt the *tête-à-tête* which was now successfully going on between Miss Seabright and her brother. The bishop, who was a great physiologist, leant over the fair songstress at the piano, and was deeply engaged in scientific observations on those vocal organs from which the music issued. Admiral Lanyard was explaining to the high-sheriff the advantage of the naval mode of execution, and

strongly advised that functionary "to rig out a yard-arm, and run up the next culprit," just, said he, "as you'd whip in a keg of spirits." His grace the duke was talking to Mr. Seabright; who was giving an account of the meeting between himself and Mombrun in London. The listener was highly entertained with the worthy parson's narrative. He had no particular veneration for Mombrun; but the talents and acquirements of the pedagogue were at all events respectable; and the duke was grateful for the service he had rendered Northern, and ready to forget not a few of his shortcomings for the sake of Miss Lavinia. When Mr. Seabright told his grace that Mombrun was to be at Longthorpe in a day or two, the latter, as a matter of course, decided to invite him to the castle.

Passing from this subject, the duke and his

friend fell to discussing magisterial business. And from some particular case just then before the board, our clergyman sailed off to the broad ocean of pauperism, poor-rates, education, and so forth. The topic was a favourite one with Mr. Seabright; and when we have "assisted" for a minute or two at a dialogue of a lighter nature between Lord Northern and Miss Helen, we shall have an opportunity (of which no one is compelled to avail himself) of listening to the parson's views upon these important subjects. First, however, for the juniors.

"Tartlet will certainly call the bishop out to-morrow," the marquis said, "and I shall have to settle it with the conqueror."

"You all deserve to be shot. You especially, for being so slow," Miss Helen answered. Her eyes were kept intent upon her needlework.

"I did my best," his lordship re[illegible]
in the lady's workbox, "but on [illegible]
amongst such a lot of sw[illegible]

"What! as Mr. Ter[illegible]

"As St. Kitts, and [illegible]

"I didn't know you [illegible]
modest."

"Didn't you thoug[illegible]
a bunch of ribands fro[illegible]
jolly colours!" put [illegible]

"Decorate your [illegible]
he'll enter the lists [illegible]

"Will you le[illegible]
at him with her [illegible]

"Mercy, [illegible]
your steel a[illegible]
baronet. Ha! [illegible]
seizes her by [illegible]

"Let me go—I'll bite you."

"Will you be good then?"

"Yes, yes."

"And promise never to thirst for my blood again?"

"I promise anything."

"To serve, honour, and obey?"

"Oh, you'll break my wrists! yes, yes!"

"There then, mind you keep your promises."

"You're a brute! and I hate you."

"Very well, very well. I shall catch you again some day."

"Look at these marks! arn't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Shall I kiss 'em, and make 'em well?"

"And all my poor ribands too, see what a state they're in! And how you've upset my box! I wish you would go away."

"Whom are these slippers for? Are they for me?"

"No."

"Why ain't they?"

"You never asked me for any."

"Whom are they for?"

"I shan't tell you."

"I know without."

"Who?"

"Lieutenant Colonel Sir—Per—cy—Ha! By Jove! you nearly put my eye out with those confounded scissors. But here he comes to try them on. I'll tell him how hard you labour for him. Froth."

"Northern! for goodness' sake!"

"Have you had much gunning this year?"

"Pretty well," says the colonel, taking the seat which the marquis now vacated. "What lovely slippers, Miss Seabright! may I ask what lucky

feet are destined to desecrate the work of those fair hands?"

"These slippers are for papa; I never work for any other—person."

"By George!" cried Lord St. Kitts, a youth of two-and-twenty, "I wish I was your papa."

Leaving now these young people to themselves, we will turn to the grave converse of the elders.

"According to you then, John," the Duke of Midland said, "it is useless to subscribe to any charity. When the winter comes, and throws thousands of these poor creatures out of work, we must see them starving, but make no effort to assist them?"

"No, my friend, you mistake me," replied the parson. "The distress which casual evils produce —the distress caused by severity of weather for instance, or by the ravages of disease, the scarcity

of food, commercial crises, and catastrophes of a similar character—is, so to speak, accidental. The causes of such distress are transient; and must be met by the temporary sacrifices of the more fortunate. But what I refer to is the permanent misery, crime, and degradation, which seem (as society is now constituted) to be a necessary condition of the many in all large towns. It is futile, I say, to treat this chronic malady with mere surface remedies. No matter how much be given; neither private munificence nor government grants can have the least remedial efficacy. And all the benevolent schemes ever yet devised for dispensing charitable donations, humane as they are, effect no lasting good whatever. So far indeed from curing the disease, they do but make it more malignant; for they act directly as stimulants to population, and thus augment the very

mischief against which they are contending. Besides this, the absence of moral restraint grows with increasing habits of dependence; and the want engendered must, sooner or later, outstrip the means to cope with it."

"Do you pretend then," asked the duke, "that the evil is incurable?"

"God forbid! Equality of course is a mere delusion: were all men levelled by the law to-day, nature would abrogate this law by its own, to-morrow. But this I say—Pauperism is not a necessary consequence of civilization: it is not a necessary truth that the sufferings of any one man should be the price of any other man's enjoyment. And where this is so, the grossness of the injustice will eventually remedy itself. Nor is the rapacity of the opulent (as the working classes imagine) the only, or even the principal, cause of

the vexatious disparity between the enjoyments of the two: the evil lies mainly with the sufferers themselves; and it is our duty to cure them of the ignorance which is at the root of it. There is one remedy, and only one—Education."

"A crotchet, parson, a crotchet—one of your visionary radical schemes for turning ploughboys into professors: mighty fine in theory, but good for nothing in practice. I tell you, John, this over-educating is the devil: it produces nothing but discontent: 'tis the plague of my life. I am pestered with applications at all hands to get fellows promoted, whose superior education, forsooth, has made them too good for their places. Your common labourer wants to be a farm bailiff; your bailiff wants to be an agent; my keeper's sons want to be clerks in a railway; and when I get 'em there, they bother me to place them in a government

office. Egad! I expect to see some of 'em in parliament before long. Every man who can write his name, or say the multiplication-table, thinks himself above his work, and is dissatisfied till he escapes from his own grade to one above him. Now, what's the consequence? We've nobody left to dig and plough, and up go wages, and with wages the price of food; and the fellows who have escaped from the evils of a low condition find they have so crowded the higher, that they are just as badly off as they were before."

"If the only effect of education were to make men discontented and ashamed of their class, it would, I admit, be an unmixed evil. That there is truth in what you say, I am well aware; but the discontent you speak of is owing more to the absence of education in the many than to the possession of it by the few. Clearly it would never

do for all to attempt escape from the lot to which they are born. But why do the few who are better educated shun their own class? Obviously because that class is a degraded one. Raise the conditions of the class; improve its physical state by liberal and just recompence for labour; elevate its standard of subsistence; cultivate its tastes; afford it means of intellectual enjoyment; heighten its dignity and its self-esteem—and you remove at once the causes of discontent and unreasonable ambition."

"May be you are right, parson, may be you are right; you know more about these things than I do. But how does this panacea of yours affect the destitution of large towns?"

"Why you yourself, my friend, have hinted at the principal cause of want. You say the scarcity of your men raises the price of your labour; and

with equal truth, that the crowding of any particular class of labourers lowers that price by competition. Now this relation between supply and demand, between numbers and the rate of wages, is so obvious to our generation, that it seems marvellous it should have needed a Malthus to point it out; and still more strange is it, that its bearings upon the increase of population should still be so little insisted upon. Yet what can be more self-evident than the truth, that no system of poor-rates, no enactment of poor-laws, no treatment of any kind, *ab extra*, can effectually mitigate the fearful struggle for self-existence, which springs from an uncontrolled tendency in human animals to increase and multiply? If the means of subsistence are limited (and all the steam and chemistry in creation cannot make them otherwise), where this limit ends starvation must begin. I

have seen something of London destitution—for the matter of that, Longthorpe has its examples too, I am sorry to say, as well as Lambeth or Bethnal Green—and I give you my word, I have seen scores of boys and girls under twenty years of age with four or five children. By the time they are thirty they have a dozen, may be. How are these to live? And, mind you, the miseries of one such family radiate in all directions; their poverty and their crimes increase in time by geometrical progression. To arrest starvation we must arrest this reckless propagation of the species. Either the matter must be referred to the guardianship of the state, and marriage be controlled, as in Prussia and many of the North German States, by reasonable restrictions; or else, which is more feasible in this country, the social condition of the sufferers must be improved

by compulsory education. We must convert these unhappy savages—indeed they are no better—into rational and responsible beings. We must teach them to comprehend their own interests. We must artificially create some sense of decency; some feeling of pride, about their children and about themselves. And when once they respect the good opinion of their fellows, they will then be restrained by the strongest authority which the civilized world has power to impose."

"Still," said the duke, not altogether convinced by the arguments of his friend; "still there are objections to this education scheme which a good many who prate about it are apt to overlook. The dangers of a little learning are proverbial. You may not think so, John, but I suspect the lower classes would be happier if it had not been for all these mischief-making "leagues" and "agita-

tions," as they call 'em. Every village now has its pot-house statesmen, who read their cheap newspapers, and get up their 'monster meetings,' where they are carried away by rascally demagogues whose sole object, as it appears to me, is to set them and their employers by the ears. What you gain by education in one way you run the risk of losing in another."

"That's begging the question, my old friend," the parson answered. "In talking of the dangers of a little learning, people forget the much greater danger of a great deal of ignorance. If you mean that a little learning is synonymous with ignorance, I quite agree with you: for it is impossible that ignorance can be harmless. Ignorance must be productive of superstition, intolerance, vice, and anarchy. Talk of the mischief done by unscrupulous demagogues! What gives these men

their power over the masses but the ignorance of the many? Could any one man, let his oratory be what it might, sway the passions of an educated and reasoning audience as a clever charlatan inflames an ignorant rabble? 'Who,' asks a well-known reverend logician, 'who ever heard of a mob of philosophers?' A very slight acquaintance with the rudiments of political economy would dispel hosts of mischievous delusions, now cherished by the working classes, about the regulations of wages, the division of property, the efficacy of strikes, and so forth; and in addition to these considerations, reflect, my dear Midland, on the advantages of education to morality."

"Yes, yes, moral instruction, I grant you. But that's your business, parson. I'm all for people going to church. I like to see good congregations—always did. But not too much schooling

John. People's morals are none the better for over-schooling."

"Well, but before we can do our duty, we must learn what that duty is. This is not always quite so clear as people fancy. True, mankind have now accumulated enough experience of the consequences of their actions to afford them pretty correct notions of good and evil in what pertains to the ordinary conduct of life. It needs but a small amount of intelligence to recognize the divine wisdom comprehended in the ten commandments; but every moralist knows that there are abundant actions which deeply concern the well-being of society, the virtue or expediency of which—and the one can only be determined by the other—are vehemently disputed by the disciples of different schools. If this is so, and if ethics is a progressive science; if, that is, we may

hope for a continuation of the increase of universal happiness, which assuredly the past history of mankind guarantees, we must look for it from the same source (humanly speaking) whence we find that it has hitherto been derived: we must look for it in the diffusion of knowledge, in the cultivation of thought, in the perpetual growth of intellect."

During the foregoing dissertation, which was one after the honest clergyman's own heart, and which was pursued for fully a quarter of an hour longer, Mrs. Lanyard and daughter had accompanied our philosopher, *à quatre mains*, with a brilliant Hungarian march. This concluded, Miss Seabright was requested to perform. Nor was the request altogether disagreeable to her; since, to say the truth, Miss Helen was desirous to remove to the other end of the room. That she was an

accomplished musician, either in respect of voice or finger, we are not at liberty to affirm. She was a good billiard player, a capital horsewoman, and at one time, before the Marquis of Northern went to Eton, could even handle a bat and throw a ball: but as to her music, suffice it to say, she sang and played like other young ladies, because it was the fashion so to do.

While she was at the instrument Mr. Wharton, who had hitherto kept aloof, came and stood close behind her: a circumstance which somehow or other produced more false notes than usual. Fortunately for the engineer, he hardly knew a drum from a trumpet, and appeared quite entranced with the whole performance. When this was over, and Mr. Wharton had complimented her in a becoming manner, they entered into conversation, which, though not particularly witty or

brilliant, was nevertheless, from other points of view, sufficiently entertaining to both of them. As they had not met for some little time, Miss Seabright found a number of questions to put, which I dare say the gentleman had no difficulty in answering to her satisfaction. How long was he to remain at the castle? What had he been doing for the Prussian government? Was it good fun being an engineer? Why had he been two whole days at Tramways without paying them a visit at Longthorpe? Did he like his new lodgings in London? For what term had he taken them? Seven years! Gracious! Did he intend to live there all his life? It depended on circumstances, did it? on *what* circumstances? Not upon himself—upon whom then? He couldn't say. Very well, she should ask Miss Lavinia. She was sure Miss Lavinia knew *all*

his secrets. And Miss Lavinia would tell her everything.

Reverting with delightful assurance to the subject of lodgings, Mr. Wharton said she must come and see what his were like ; and give him her advice about decorations, etc. It was highly important, when one was establishing oneself for a period like seven years, that *et cætera.*

"But how could she come, she should like to know? Who ever heard of young ladies calling on gentlemen?"

"For the matter of that, plenty of ladies had done him that honour before now; friends of hers too."

"What, old Miss Mumford," she supposed?

No, young ladies, and beautiful ladies."

"Indeed! and friends of hers? Who *could* they be?"

"Lady de Crecy, for instance. Did not she answer to the description?"

"Lady de Crecy was married, and married women could do whatever they pleased."

"That was *her* notion of married life, was it? Did she intend to act upon that principle when she married?"

"Most decidedly! What else did he suppose she would ever marry for?"

The stalwart engineer was delighted with her naïveté, and thought her more enchanting than ever.

"And what did he think of Lady De Crecy? Was she not very fascinating?"

"Very, to those whom she chose to please: but he had seen her snub people abominably. She was rather capricious, and too intolerant of stupid people, and had too much admiration for talent,

or rather cleverness—which women never were able to distinguish from genuine talent."

"It was a pity, was it not, that she had married a man so much older than herself. She herself couldn't think how women could do such things."

"There was no accounting for any woman's acts; especially for the acts of Lady de Crecy. She was very impulsive, and very conscientious; and was therefore occasionally inconsistent, through sometimes following inclination, and sometimes a sense of duty. Nevertheless there was no denying that she was charming."

Of the two or three who kept a watchful eye directed towards the sofa, no one was more observant than Sir Percy Froth. He screened himself behind the last impression of the "Courier," so as to command a full view of the young lady in whose fortunes, or fortune rather, he took the

warmest interest. The fact is, the late baronet, who in many respects resembled his son, had always lived in a style that did credit to the elegance of his tastes, and the boundless selfishness of his desires. And having experienced the inconvenience attending the undivided pursuit of his own pleasure, made provision against his son's erring in the same way, by leaving him without the means. For all this, the present baronet was to the full as extravagant as his father. He denied himself nothing; and argued, with truth perhaps, that his friends and his tradesmen (to both of whom he was heavily indebted), could much better afford to lend, than he to pay. Being hopelessly in pecuniary difficulties, he had for some time past turned his serious attention to the attractive young heiress of Longthorpe. And while he indulged in the pleasing prospect of be-

ing possessed, sooner or later, of her property, he could not but regard a rival in the light of a thief who was seeking to pick his pocket.

This particular evening had done more to blight his prospects than anything he had yet experienced. He had long been counting on this meeting. He had ascertained from Mr. Seabright, when in town, that Wharton was expected at the castle, and he was very anxious to discover what course affairs had taken in his absence. For his part, he had never felt much alarm at the rumour bruited about concerning Miss Seabright and the marquis. He was no mean judge of appearances in such matters, and had seen sufficient of his lordship's behaviour at Longthorpe, and elsewhere, to be easy on that score. But of Wharton he was much more apprehensive. And to-night he had noticed a number of trifling looks and movements

which tended to confirm his worst suspicions. The habitual self-possession and pertness of the young lady vanished in presence of this offensive engineer. In the place of these, the colonel detected nervous eagerness, trepidation, sudden changes of colour, apparent unwillingness to look her companion in the face; and countless other indications of a state of things, which occasioned him intense annoyance. After Sir Percy retired to his room, many were the schemes which his inventive brain suggested for disposing of this dangerous rival. At last an idea flashed upon him, which seemed for the moment to promise some hopes of victory. On the following morning the plan recurred to him: and should the suspicion prove true upon which his design was framed, it would contain, at any rate, this much comfort—if he could do himself no good, he might be the ruin of his adversary.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN the clergyman and his daughter reached home that night it was nearly half-past eleven. But notwithstanding the hour, Miss Helen found herself so little inclined for sleep that she offered to sit up with her papa while he finished the composition of his discourse. Whether her company would have contributed much to the impressiveness of his sermon cannot be decided; Mr. Seabright thanked her for the proposal, but positively declined to accept of it. The good man nevertheless set himself to his task in solitude; nor did he retire to rest until it was completed to his satisfaction.

It was also late before Miss Nelly relinquished the pleasant thoughts which the party at the castle had conjured up. The luxurious young creature wrapt herself in a comfortable dressing-gown, ensconced her little feet in a fur-lined pair of slippers, and fell into a pleasing reverie over the future which awaited her. Her predominant feeling was one of exaltation at the certainty of Wharton's entire devotion. Knowing him so intimately as she did, it is strange that she should have had any misgivings upon the subject. Possibly uncertainty may be a necessary concomitant of the tender passion. However this may be, Miss Helen had been anxious before the meeting, and was at present free from that anxiety. In the course of her meditations she reviewed in turn the merits or pretensions of several other admirers. She considered respectively the advantages of becoming

Lady Froth, Countess of St. Kitts, and the Marchioness of Northern. The first of these titles could be had for a word at anytime. The second might probably be won for very little trouble. But the last was not to be thought of. Had *this* been within her reach, she herself could hardly say what might have been the consequences. Not that ambition alone would tempt her; but Northern, like Wharton, was her oldest friend and playfellow; and she fancied that had the two changed places the difficulty in choosing between them would have been *almost* as great. Her doubtfulness on this point need not be shared by us. Whatever might have happened had circumstances been altered, the fact that Wharton was devoted to her, and Northern to some one else, was quite sufficient to turn the scales in favour of the former.

Most of the evenings which Miss Seabright spent at the castle were pretty similar to the one described. Now and then there would be an importation of country neighbours; who came for a night or two, or only to dine. If there were young people amongst them, Lady Selina would institute a round game, to which she herself was extremely partial. To be sure, she preferred intellectual amusements, such as *bouts rimées* and the like; yet she dearly loved a little gambling, and pounced upon the penny stakes with astonishing avidity. Sometimes more boisterous sports varied the evening pastimes. "Post," or "Hunt the Slipper," or a carpet dance, would be proposed by Northern, if he happened to be in spirits. On such occasions Selina would preside at the piano, and furtively take note of those whose destinies it was her mission to control. It was not easy, however, to

arrive at any fixed conclusion. Wharton took no part in the noisy revels, and rarely joined the soberer ones. He would sit aside with Miss Lavinia, or talk business with the duke in an adjoining room. As to Helen, she was the merriest and most romping of the party. The chances were, Northern would contrive to get near her, whatever the game might be; and whenever these two were side by side, a constant badinage was sure to be kept afloat. Still Selina's suspicions assumed from day to day a more alarming tone. Incidents frequently occurred which opened her eyes to the actual state of things.

One night, at a servants' ball, she was sadly discouraged by her observations. She had looked forward to this event in the hopes that something would transpire to set her mind at rest: under the excitement of a crowded dance people were less

restrained than usual. And the Tramways' balls were such jovial affairs that the truth would be sure to crop out under this inspiriting influence.

They were indeed the merriest of dances. The duke himself led off with Mrs. Peach, the buxom housekeeper; and Firkin, the purple-faced butler, followed with her grace the duchess. The old gentleman, with his tall and portly figure, performed his steps with beautiful precision; greeting, as he passed, those of his dependents whose faces were familiar to him; and whispering his little compliments into the ear of each blushing and rustic beauty when his turn came to twirl her through the maze. Then what suffocating dignity suffused the vinous countenance of the pompous Firkin! How he scowled upon his inferiors who dared to shoulder him, or impede his progress through the crowd! How scarlet the complexions

of the maids became, contrasted with the white muslin in which they were adorned! How the tall footmen, and the short stablemen—redolent of their vocation—bounced their partners up and down, in time and out of time, as though St. Vitus had possessed them! Wonderful were the enduring powers of that Longthorpe band too,—the perpetual jigging of that fiddler's arm—the eternal thrumming of the harper—that cornet's inexhaustible supply of wind! Nor were the castle guests behind the household in appreciation of these efforts. Our friend the parson was as frisky as the youngest of them; even the sedate Miss Mumford forgot her rheumatism, and hobbled through a quadrille with the duke or Mr. Wharton, as though she had been walking a minuet, or the graceful saraband of times gone by.

In the midst of all these doings Lady Selina

was puzzled to keep an eye upon her little flock. Her brother and Sir Percy had already danced with Helen Seabright: but while the girl was resting on a sofa by Selina's side, the baronet again requested the pleasure of her hand. Miss Nelly would not comply. The colonel tried persuasion. She was still obdurate. Was she then engaged? She, fibbing, alas! says "Yes," and the gentleman retires.

Now glides young Wharton to the front. And with the sweetest smile, Miss Helen asks him, "Do you *never* dance?"

"Never," says this hero, bluntly.

"I think you might make one exception in your life."

"I couldn't if I tried," said he.

"Then you ought to learn at once," she answered.

"If any one would teach me."

"Perhaps you never asked 'any one' to do so."

"Come on, Nelly," shouts the marquis, bursting in upon them; "a *vis-à-vis* wanted here, make haste; come along Wharton."

"Now Wharton!" cries the duke, "they're all waiting for you."

Rumpty-tumpty-tidly-um, goes the band, and Helen and her friend are suddenly in the thick of it: what is more, they are crossing hands with Sir Percy and Miss Lanyard. The baronet was furious, and Selina in despair. The latter had never seen Helen's conduct so marked before. The girl's manner to the engineer was much more striking than her language. In fact, Helen intended it to be so. She intended to teach Selina not to meddle with other people's business. Probably, too, she had no objection to give the colonel a little *coup d'épingle*. Any how, he smarted

with the pique inflicted by her preference; and more than ever hated the lucky individual who supplanted him.

Now, while envy and jealousy were fermenting in Sir Percy's heart, and as he stood apart sipping a cup of hot tea, the burnisher—a giant of prodigious bulk, who was dancing the polka with Miss Butters, the stillroom maid—alighted with energetic agility full upon the baronet's toes, causing him to recoil with a jump of agony right against Terrier, the agent. The movement, which was oblique, brought Froth's elbow into the pit of poor Terrier's stomach; and emptied the cup of scalding tea over the cambric bosom of his shirt.

"I say!" yelled the parboiled sufferer, "can't you look where you're going?"

"Confound you!" cried the angry baronet, "why don't you get out of the way then?"

"What's that you said, sir?" returned the injured Terrier, who, by the way, was always ready to resent an insult, even when not intended.

"I say you're an ass," growled the impatient colonel.

"You shall answer for this," cried the now scarlet-faced agent.

"Oh, go to the devil!" snarled Sir Percy, and turning on his heel felt himself relieved. Still, however, the main cause of his vexation lasted through the evening. So successful had Miss Seabright's first instructions been, that her partner requested her to repeat them in a second dance, and before the third was over Mr. Wharton was as perfect as could be wished. Indeed, to both of them everything seemed perfection, for no couple in the room were happier than they.

Why did they not choose to continue so? Why

should so amiable a young lady as Miss Seabright ever be foolish enough to indulge in that dangerous humour called caprice? I know there never has been—but will there never be?—one of your sex, my dear Miss Nelly, free from that unfortunate propensity. I fear you know too well the power with which it arms you. Not a week after this domestic ball, Lady Selina, or any one, might have supposed that Helen was desperately captivated by Sir Percy Froth; and moreover that she felt rather a dislike than otherwise to Mr. Wharton. It matters little what example we select to instance this inconsistent change; for it was not so much the whim of an hour as the persistent result of apparent deliberation.

One day, when the lake was frozen, and the whole party betook themselves to the ice, the humour we speak of was notably conspicuous.

Besides the ladies and gentlemen from the castle, there was a considerable gathering from Longthorpe and elsewhere, a lot of whom—mainly boys—were playing hocky and tumbling over one another with wild and uproarious delight. The duchess, the Seabrights, and the admiral were enjoying the scene from the bank; while the younger people amused themselves skating or sliding on a part of the lake appropriated to their exclusive use. Northern and Wharton were vying with each other in cutting 'spread eagles' and figures of eight. Lord St. Kitts and Mr. Terrier took charge of Miss Lanyard; and each giving her a hand dragged her over the glassy surface at such speed that the jolly girl fairly screamed with the exhilarating motion. But Froth, who was the most expert of the company, was performing wonders for the admiration of the

general. And so worthy of praise did Miss Seabright deem him, that she not only rewarded his feats of skill with her sweetest smiles, but condescended to take a lesson of him in the art of outside edge. Sir Percy was enchanted with the charge of this fair pupil: and the better to impart his instructions advised removal to a distance, where they could practice in greater security. The proposition was readily acceded to; and they remained entirely undisturbed, until Mr. Wharton joined them, with a message from Lord Northern cautioning them against a spring, in the vicinity of which it was highly dangerous. Miss Seabright hardly deigned to notice Mr. Wharton's friendly warning; yet signified displeasure at the gentleman's interference. Wharton had, before to day, remarked her altered manner, and hurt at this new instance of it, betrayed some

signs of his impatience. Instead of leaving her to get a ducking, which was no more than her desert, the silly fellow begged her to remove to a safer spot.

"Really," said she, in an almost peevish tone, "I am quite capable of taking care of myself. If I want any assistance, I suppose Sir Percy Froth will give it me."

After this Wharton was compelled to leave; but before he was out of hearing Froth remarked aloud, "What impudence! He evidently fancies he has the right to govern you. Great clumsy elephant! He pretends the ice will not bear us two, and brings a third upon it as heavy as both together."

To this Helen made no answer. She may have repented of her severity. She certainly reflected that it would be most distressing should she hap-

pen now to tumble in, for whether Wharton pitied, or exulted in, that misfortune, either would be humiliating after what had passed. Sir Percy however would not hear of a retreat; so they stayed where they were, and worked industriously at the outside edge.

It now began to grow dusk; and the duchess was begging Admiral Lanyard to call the young folks in, when who should arrive but Mr. Firkin, followed by a couple of footmen with hot negus and a tray of glasses. The pomposity of the butler, who blandly handed about the tray himself, stirred the spirit of mischief within the bosom of the admiral. The naval officer politely requested Mr. Firkin to take the 'grog' to his daughter, and at the same time desire her to come ashore. Unmindful of the perils of such an expedition, the duchess seconded the appeal; and thus urged,

Firkin was forced to go. His first voyage was triumphantly accomplished; not however without causing infinite amusement to the two footmen, who longed to see the anxious shufflings of their chief terminate in a fall. Emboldened by success Firkin now went on to Helen. Twice he lost his balance, and nearly lost his tray. Yet he probably would have reached her but for a most unlucky accident. On a sudden, the hocky ball flew spinning right between the butler's legs. This did not knock him off them, though it morally upset him. Seeing what had happened, the crowd set up a yell; and expecting to be run down, Firkin unwisely tried to fly. The boys in front pressed on, and their shouts rang in his ears. Then terror seized his brain, and dizziness his sight. His heels were in the air, but his head was under water.

For a circumference of many yards the ice was shivered into pieces, so that Sir Percy and Miss Seabright were involved in the catastrophe. Fortunately the water was only three or four feet deep. Instead therefore of the rescue, which Mr. Wharton had been ready for, the young lady and her companions were quite able to save themselves. And when they scuttled out drenched and soiled with mud, their pitiful appearance excited more merriment than alarm. The duchess however would have Miss Seabright put to bed; and dispatched a groom for Dr. Bompas, and a note for Mrs. Seabright, to anticipate report.

CHAPTER IX.

Miss Mumford's cottage was part and parcel of herself. It was lonely, like herself. It was weather-beaten and old-fashioned; with rooms on different levels, full of alcoves and odd recesses, and projections in every wall and corner. It was a queer, but comfortable old place, and like its inmates—*sui generis*. The old lady had three old servants: Sally the gaunt housemaid, Martha the fat cook, and Robin the stableman and gardener. They came with her when she came, and were there, of course, for life. It was a snug, peaceable abode, in which change of any kind was unknown. And yet its poor old mistress had been, indeed was

still, a sufferer. What then had been her history? Many had asked that question: but no one in Longthorpe could find an answer. The little we know of it may here be briefly told.

Miss Mumford's first great trouble was on account of an only brother. Her father and mother had died when she was young; leaving this brother in her sole charge. He was a poor feeble creature, weak in intellect, weak in character. He was disgraced at college, became a drunkard, and finished his career by self-destruction. Her second trouble was also (this time indirectly) through this same only brother. The young man had a college friend, not a wrecked debauchee like himself, but a smart dashing fellow with abundant brains, one who had gained scholastic honours and taken a high degree. This friend had been kind to Miss Lavinia's brother, had kept him out of

scrapes, kept him sometimes from drink and low associates, taken care he did not fling away his money—by retaining some of it, perhaps, within his own control. In reward for this friend's kindness, the brother introduced him to Lavinia. He was a good-looking fellow; and though not troubled with a *morbid* conscience, possessed a genial heart and manner. In those days Lavinia herself was not ill-favoured. Her figure was graceful, her complexion good, and her eyes were even beautiful. Her brother's friend admired them. And she admired him. Love followed the introduction. An engagement followed love: as it now and then happens, however, want of means necessitated delay. For about a twelvemonth correspondence was kept up. After that it intermitted; and in course of time it ceased. Cruel apprehensions smote Lavinia's faithful heart. Appeals were

made, but no answer was returned, and then befell her brother's fearful suicide: and then the long put-off conviction that she was deserted, and alone. The name of him who treated her thus shamefully was Wharton. He subsequently changed it to Mombrun.

For a month or two Lavinia felt some bitterness of resentment, but drifted back into the belief that Wharton was perfection; that he loved her still; and would have married her but for poverty. So she cherished this delusion, and had lived upon it until now. And no vestal ever ministered to the "sacred flame" more devotedly than she. But she did not whimper over it, nor fret and pine over it, nor fancy that no love had ever been so true, or half so miserable as hers; for she was a brave woman, and bore her disappointment patiently, and contented herself with doing what service she

could to the man whose faithlessness had doomed her to penitential solitude.

Some excellent services she had rendered too. Her four hundred pounds per annum, which Mombrun had once despised, had been mainly expended in keeping him from penury and gaol. It was she who procured for him the tutorship to the marquis. And his son—the son of the woman who had supplanted her—she had educated and cared for as though he had been her own. Besides all this, there was another debt which Mombrun owed her. It had been the first object of this man's life to keep his son in ignorance of the relationship between them. His own repute was tainted by the circumstance which Froth elsewhere alluded to; and which occurred when Wharton was an infant. Mombrun, for his own sake, then took his present name; and fearing lest the child

he loved more than anything on earth, might some day be ashamed of him, decided, perhaps unwisely, to conceal the reason for his doing so; and hence, of necessity, to conceal the fact itself.

Now in order to fulfil this purpose Mombrun had sought Miss Mumford's aid. She took the child at once, and brought it up in the belief that its father was long since dead; that his father had been Mombrun's dearest friend; that Mombrun had adopted him,—Wharton, and been to him in childhood all that a father could be; and that she herself had taken him only when Mombrun's means had failed.

Thus had she returned good for evil. Mombrun still lived upon her charity. And Wharton, who somehow or other had heard of Mombrun's trial, and was even aware that his father had been entangled in it, was thoroughly convinced of that

father's innocence, but was still ignorant of his identity.

Just as she kept Mombrun's secret, she kept the secrets of other people. So every one about the place made the old lady a confident. She was the repository of endless mysteries and troubles. She knew all about the Northern affair, and the Helen and Wharton affair, and the particulars of a dozen other similar affairs no less interesting and romantic.

It was in consequence of this well-known fact that Sir Percy Froth called upon Miss Mumford a few days after the incident on the ice, in the faint hope of obtaining from her some solution, or proof, of the suspicion upon which his new designs were founded. It so happened that the duchess and Selina were paying a visit at the cottage when Sir Percy called. While he is wait-

ing for their departure we may venture to step in. Naturally the topic of conversation which now engaged these ladies was the usual one of love and matrimony.

"But did you notice," asked Selina, "how mortified she looked when Northern would not take her into dinner? I saw distinctly the reproachful glance she gave him."

"I did not observe it," Miss Lavinia coldly answered.

"But you *do* think she is very much in love, don't you?" appealed her grace, as if she thought the girl's fondness might be the death of her.

"With whom?" says the inexorable Lavinia, presenting her trumpet for the answer.

"With Northern," the duchess murmurs.

"With no one?" repeats the listener.

"Northern, my Nor-thern."

"I cannot say," replied Miss Mumford, with a shake of the head.

"My dear Miss Lavinia," cries the younger lady, "you are more discouraging than ever, you never would see how fond they are of each other. And now I believe you want Helen to be fond of some one else—of some one else, I say."

"I do not say she cares for any one else. It is impossible for me to say who she cares for. You know, duchess, they never were what I should call in love with each other. There is too much levity in their manner. Their behaviour seems to me exactly what one sees between brother and sister."

"Yes," sighs the duchess, "that is too true."

"Ah but, of course," says Selina, "they would behave like that, brought up as Helen was, quite as one of the family. You are too romantic, dear

Miss Mumford; you expect lovers of the present day to conduct themselves like Sir Charles Grandison in the novel. But people are more natural now-a-days. You must not look for the manners of a *petit maitre*, or the set speeches of an euphuist from a beau of the nineteenth century. Why, I have heard you say you think it shocking that sons and daughters no longer address their parents as 'sir' and 'madam.' I don't wonder at your seeing nothing in Northern's manner to Helen."

"Yes, my dear, there is indeed as you say a great change in manners since I was a girl. They may be more natural now—if rudeness to women and want of respect for age be natural; but I confess I do not see that any of us are much the gainers by it."

Lady Selina was acquainted with the old lady's style of fencing, and went on to say, "Perhaps

you think that either Northern or Helen have set their hearts on other objects."

"Poor Northern," sighs the duchess.

"Hush! mama," says the daughter, in a whisper.

"Lord Northern makes no confident of me," says Miss Lavinia, "and as to Helen, after all, she is but a child."

"She's over twenty," cries Selina; "nonsense about her being a child! Come dear," taking one of the withered old hands coaxingly, "you know very well that Nelly Seabright tells you all about it. Does she or does she not care for Mr. Wharton?"

"Poor Nelly," sighs the duchess.

"Mr. Wharton did you say?" reiterates Lavinia. "Gracious! How should I know?" and the look and exclamation deceived even Lady Selina.

"I don't believe she does know after all,"

mutters her ladyship to herself. Then turning to her mother, "We shall get nothing out of her," she said, "it is only waste of time to try."

Directly these visitors left the cottage, Sir Percy, who had prowled about until the duchess' pony carriage was out of sight, walked in. It was not the first time the baronet had honoured the aged spinster with his company; when last at Tramways he had tried to ingratiate himself with Miss Lavinia. But his success had not been great.

The fault which Miss Lavinia ascribed to the generality of young men could not be imputed to the baronet. No one could be more polished and refined than he, and little favour as the colonel found in the penetrating eyes of the shrewd old maid, she could not but be gratified by the courtesy with which he treated her. Froth had had in his time pretty extensive experiences of the gentler

sex; and he never forgot, what some men seem never to learn, that however old a woman may be she once was young; and that however ugly, she is always ready to believe the reverse. Miss Lavinia was no exception to the rule, and when Sir Percy exclaimed, "How *well* you're looking, my dear Miss Mumford," with a smile that made the "well" sound like "pretty," and a manner that almost said, "I should like to kiss you," what wonder the poor old thing was reminded of greetings that had really meant all this.

She laughed, however, rather scornfully, and said, "Looks are deceptive, Sir Percy Froth."

"Yes," says the baronet, "women's looks are, I know. To mean one thing and look another, Miss Mumford, is as natural to your sex as credulity to ours."

Miss Mumford croaked, "Have you been so

badly treated, sir? I should have thought you of all men were less sinned against than sinning."

"You judge me too harshly, madam."

"Most men would deem the judgment flattering, I believe."

"You do not think so ill of me, I hope, as to count me amongst the number. I am sure Miss Mumford has no reason to question the sincerity of my professions."

"None whatever, Sir Percy, I am only canvassing your title to impeach the sincerity of my sex!"

"Ah, Miss Mumford, if all women were as true as you!"

"What does Sir Percy Froth know of my fidelity? Perhaps I am as little to be trusted as the rest of womankind."

"Then I must pay the penalty of my simplicity,"

says the baronet. "I allowed you to guess my secret last year because I looked upon you (pardon me, Miss Mumford, for the presumption), because I looked upon you as a friend,—a friend in whom I could place implicit faith, a friend, my dear madam, in whose sympathy and wisdom I might confidently rely. Was I wrong in so regarding you? No, I feel you have a woman's heart; a heart full of tenderness, a heart that knows what it is to love, and perhaps to love in vain." This was a random shot, but it hit the mark. "I see by those eyes," continued he, in louder tones, "that you are not deaf to my appeal. I see——"

"I can hear you very well," breaks in the lady, with a touch of humour.

"Why do you laugh at me?" says he. "Do you feel no compassion for my disappointment? Is it so slight a matter to have one's sweetest hopes

destroyed, one's best affections unreturned, one's dreams of happiness dispelled for ever? Can Miss Mumford look with cruel indifference upon a love so true, so unfortunate as mine?"

"I fear, Sir Percy, that neither my indifference nor my solicitude would avail in such a matter."

"You are mistaken, dear madam. To me your interest in my success would be everything. The consciousness that I was being guided by your advice would be the greatest encouragement I could have. And I should feel that a false step would be impossible were I counselled by one so good, so judicious, as yourself."

"I am vastly obleeged by your flattering opinion, Colonel Froth," says the aged spinster, with a courtly bow. "But what advice can an old woman give a young gallant like you, when the stake is a lady's hand, sir?"

"I am sensible that I must win that hand for myself, and I might not even now despair if I were sure of fair play."

"Whom does Sir Percy Froth suspect of foul?"

"Well, that's hardly the word," says the colonel, smiling; "especially as everything is fair in love. But when I spoke of advice I was thinking that if I am to be ousted by a successful rival, and if—and if, Miss Mumford——"

"Well, why do you hesitate?"

"Why, if you know this must be so, it would spare an infinity of needless pain to admit it."

"And if I do not know anything of the kind?"

"Ah! dear Miss Lavinia; dare I believe in your ignorance?"

"Most confidently."

"You do not know, then, that Wharton and Miss Seabright are engaged?"

"Certainly not."

"Do you know that they are not engaged?"

"My dear sir, how should I know anything of their engagements? Do you imagine Mr. Wharton confides in me as you do?"

"At all events, Miss Seabright does; she has often told me so."

"Indeed! and would you have me betray her confidences? You trust me with yours; would you do so if you found that I was capable of breaking faith with others?"

"The information I ask could not diminish their happiness, but would greatly mitigate the loss of mine."

"Then believe me, Sir Percy, if there be any engagement between Mr. Wharton and Miss Seabright I am as ignorant of it as you profess to be."

"That Wharton aspires to the hand of the young lady you are of course aware?"

"I have the same opportunities of judging that you have. I may see them rather oftener, perhaps."

"It is easy for anyone to discern what his conduct means. And I have too much reason to fear that his advances are favourably received."

Miss Lavinia made no response.

"They may not be formally engaged to each other as yet: in fact, I may console myself with the assurance, that had they been so you certainly would have known it." A pause: "But it seems to me the next thing to it. And if anything could reconcile me to my own defeat, it would be the success of so good a fellow as Wharton."

Miss Mumford fixed her eyes upon the baronet's face: but both his countenance and hers were

entirely illegible. Froth was forced to pursue his way in darkness.

"In that sentiment," he said, "I am sure we both agree."

"I believe Mr. Wharton to be a very worthy young man," was her cautious answer.

"You have known him a good many years, have you not?"

"I have known him some time."

"I hear he is making great strides in his profession. The duke seems to think a good deal of him too. I suppose he is earning a fairish income; is he not? I mean, money would not be an object with him in making up to Miss Seabright."

"He is very well off, I believe," replied Miss Mumford, curtly.

"I suppose he got his introduction to the castle

through Northern's old tutor—what's-his name —Mombrun?"

"More through his own merits, I should say."

"Pray was he ever in business with Mombrun?"

"Never that I am aware of."

"Were they not? Curious! I fancied they had been connected in some way. A very odd man —Mombrun; you know him intimately, I think?"

"I do."

"What a thing it is to have a friend like you, Miss Mumford."

"*Apropos* to what, Sir Percy?"

"To push one on in the world, to be sure! If he had not been a friend of yours (which of course vouches for his respectability), he is the last man one would have expected to see tutor to so important a personage as the young Marquis of Northern."

"Why so?" asks the lady, a faint tinge of colour mantling her wrinkled cheeks.

"Well, one has heard rumours about Mombrun —strange stories of his former life. But one never knows what to believe: people tell such lies. I dare say there is not a word of truth in them."

"What have you heard, sir?" inquires Miss Lavinia, readjusting the trumpet, and leaning over with eagerness to catch the answer.

"I have heard—but you are his friend, and it might offend you, Miss Mumford, were I to repeat what there is probably no foundation for."

"It is better to speak out than to insinuate, Sir Percy. And a friend is likely to prove a safer hearer than an enemy."

"Well, 'tis said that Mombrun was once tried for forgery. Did you ever hear anything of it?"

"Yes," says Miss Lavinia, suddenly flushing

with indignation, "Mr. Mombrun was tried, and acquitted. His innocence was proved; he was the victim of a wicked plot—so far, at least, as to suffer the indignity of a false accusation. But his innocence was proved. There is not a more honest man breathing than Mr. Mombrun. Do you think, Sir Percy Froth, that I would have brought him into the bosom of a family from which I have received nothing but kindness, and for which I have the warmest affection, had there been a question of his integrity? No! Mombrun is a strictly honourable gentleman. There is not a more kind-hearted, deserving, and accomplished one in the world. I have no hesitation in saying that the rumours you have heard, sir, are the basest falsehoods that were ever coined."

Poor Miss Mumford! that fond heart of hers was at its old tricks again, directly its tyrant's

name was mentioned. She—so sagacious, so watchful over herself, so habituated to subdue her emotions,—forgot her wonted self-control the moment injustice was done to that paragon of honour, to whom he owed so much!

"I make not the least doubt, my dear Miss Mumford," pursued the remorseless colonel, "that you are right in your estimate of Mr. Mombrun; but the world always will take the most uncharitable view of a man's misfortunes; and neither you nor I can prevent people saying ill-natured things about our friend. Unfortunately, too, it seems that Mombrun is only an assumed name; and the fact of having an *alias* will tell against a man. People are always apt to fancy this in itself is a proof of guilt."

"To those who love to crush the fallen, and triumph in the misfortunes of others, everything

is pervertible into the mischievous evidence they so keenly seek after. If Mombrun changed a name that was tarnished by the malignity of an enemy, he probably did so for the sake of others, not for his own."

"To be sure, to be sure; nothing more natural. I forget at the moment Mombrun's real name?" interrogated Sir Percy, with affected carelessness.

"Is he lying?" was Miss Mumford's anxious doubt. "It is not in my power to refresh your memory," said she.

"'Tis of no consequence, only, a friend of mine, or rather a friend of my poor father's, who is acquainted with the particulars of Mombrun's affair, was talking to me about him the other day; and he mentioned casually that our friend Wharton was in some way connected with the—the

transaction. Now, knowing, as I do, that there is not an honester fellow breathing than Wharton, I assured him he must be mistaken, Hugh Wharton could not possibly be the man he meant."

"Hugh Wharton!" exclaimed Miss Lavinia, "why at the time of Mr. Mombrun's trial Hugh was not more than——How did your friend know Mombrun?" asked the old lady, suddenly checking herself.

"Know him? well they were old acquaintances, I believe."

Miss Lavinia looked puzzled. "He could have known very little about the matter if he told you that Hugh Wharton had anything to do with it," says she, looking hard over the tops of her spectacles.

"I dare say, I dare say," returned the baronet, easily. "Some other man of that name, no

doubt. I was misled, you see, by the name; and, illogically enough, inferred a connection between Mombrun and Wharton, merely, I suppose, from the intimacy of both with you."

Sir Percy, after a few more futile attempts to draw from Miss Mumford some admission which might criminate Wharton, politely took his leave; protesting ere he went how charmed he was to find the malicious rumours about Mombrun so satisfactorily refuted. And as for Wharton, he had always felt assured that his informant was quite wrong in fancying that *he* had anything to do, either with the supposed forgery, or with the gentleman who (according to Miss Mumford) had been so wickedly accused of it.

Whether the sagacious old maid or the crafty baronet was the more puzzled after the above conversation, it would be difficult to determine. Let

us first explain Sir Percy's confusion; and then unravel Miss Lavinia's.

Of course the reader understands that "the friend" from whom the baronet pretended to have got his information, was a fiction. We know that Froth had heard the story, which he was now striving to remember, from his father. But he thought it prudent to substitute a living witness for a dead one, to show Miss Mumford that concealment on her part was of no avail; since he could at once obtain particulars from this friend. Now, the story which the late baronet had told in his son's hearing was simply this—that the tutor whom the Midlands had provided for the marquis was a disreputable old scamp, whose name was originally Wharton; that he had been tried for forgery; and had changed his name to Mombrun. This was all. What then was running in Sir Percy's mind,

and how did he hope to damage his successful rival? The fact is, he had forgotten what his father had told him some eight or ten years ago. At that time, though intimate with the Midlands, he had never seen nor heard of Mombrun or Wharton, consequently took not the faintest interest in either. The story made no impression on him at all. Northern and his tutors were equally objects of indifference to the dashing young guardsman. His father did not relate the fact to him. He had overheard it casually at some forgotten dinner party. The wonder was that he had any recollection of the tale whatever. Nothing but his present intense interest in Wharton would have brought it back again. And now all he could recollect was the mere outline and skeleton of the fact. His father had mentioned the name of Wharton in connection

with Northern's tutor: and this tutor had changed his name in consequence of a forgery.

It is likely enough that his eagerness to prove his rival guilty may have obscured his penetration. Be that as it may, so vague and so confused were his ideas, that having set himself upon a false clue, this conversation with Miss Mumford had rather perplexed than aided him. He had, it is true, elicited an acknowledgment of Mombrun's supposed crime and change of name: but this he did not care a fig for, unless it could prove Wharton's confederacy with the criminal. And of such connection between those two, there was as yet no proof whatever. He was sure Miss Mumford would not tell the lie direct to serve any purpose; and when he had suggested Wharton's participation in the forgery, she almost sneered at his ignorance of the truth. Whoever had told him

that Wharton was concerned in it, knew very little of the matter; these were her words; and were they not conclusive? After he left the cottage, he revolved the conversation and the old maid's manner over and over in his mind. And at last the thought occurred to him—could it have been this fellow's father? With this we leave him, and return to Miss Lavinia.

It was a dreadful blow to her, to find that so dangerous a man as Froth was in possession of Mombrun's secret. However ignorant he might be, he knew the terrible truth that Mombrun had been tried for felony; and that his true name was not the one he bore. He had a friend alive who had told him this, and could probably tell him more. Meanwhile how much did he know at present, and how much was he in the dark about? His pretended ignorance and indifference Miss

Mumford valued at their proper worth. She thoroughly comprehended his hostile motive, but could not as yet guage his power of doing harm. If he was master of the whole position, why should he cross question her? It was evident he wanted information, which he did not possess. Whither had his questions tended? He had asked for Mombrun's name: if he was really and truly ignorant of that, he was ignorant of all it concerned him most to know. For (it must be borne in mind) according to Miss Lavinia's supposition, Froth was seeking evidence to show, that Wharton was the son of a man whose respectability had been doubted. She looked upon his pretended belief that Hugh himself was the Wharton who had been impeached, and upon the question of a partnership betwen Hugh and Mombrun, as mere blinds to throw her off her guard. In a word, she

did not give Froth credit for the confusion of ideas which his questions and remarks implied. She calculated that, knowing so much as he obviously did know, it was a hundred to one but he knew more than he wished her to detect. In this way the shrewd old lady overreached herself.

Nevertheless what had passed thoroughly roused her to a sense of the danger which menaced her dearest friends. She was not very uneasy about the mischief Froth could do to Wharton in Helen's eyes, if that were his intention; but if all the facts connected with Mombrun's change of name were in the hands of this unscrupulous man, he would possess a fearful power of avenging his loss of Helen upon Wharton, and at the same time of bringing incalculable misery upon her dear Mombrun.

CHAPTER X.

It was about two days after these conversations that Miss Mumford received a visit from Miss Seabright. The young lady constantly walked over by herself for a little gossip at the cottage. Of late these visits had become rather more frequent; for the intercourse between the two had grown more confidential than usual. Certain confessions, or half-confessions, were made by Miss Nelly, in which Miss Lavinia took the deepest interest. Although we must do the latter the justice to say, that she often rated Helen for not speaking with the same candour to her father. Nelly declared she would certainly do so if her

papa were not a man. Whereupon Miss Lavinia replied that the objection was not exceptional, and ought to be overcome. Helen begged that her secret might, for the present, go no further. "Not," said she, "that I have any secrets to tell; for I am sure papa knows quite as much about it as I do." Her present call was the first since the adventure on the ice. She had not been very pleased with her own performances on that day, and had been looking forward to a spare hour, when she might acknowledge her transgressions; and obtain from the venerable priestess the absolution which her own conscience refused her.

"It was very stupid of me, I must own," said she, "not to mind what he kept on telling me."

"Besides," said Miss Lavinia, "it showed a disposition (according to your account) to treat his watchfulness with contempt."

"Yes," owned the remorseful Helen.

"And to encourage another man, which was worse," says old Miss Nemesis.

"But he couldn't be so foolish as to think I preferred Sir Percy Froth to him, could he?"

"If you did your best to make him, he might. Have you seen much of him since?"

"Only for an hour or two the next morning, before we went home again."

"I hope you contrived to show him that you intended no offence?"

"Yes, I fancy so. But you know dear, a girl cannot show *all* she feels. Can she?"

"All is not necessary. A girl may do wrong sometimes to conceal *all* she feels."

"But suppose, Miss Lavinia, that he should misunderstand me; one would look such a fool. You see if I were him, and he were me, it would be different, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, my love," says the other, gravely; "but why suppose that Hugh should put a wrong construction on your behaviour? What interpretation are you afraid of his ascribing to your conduct?"

"He might think me too forward, perhaps."

"More probably he thinks just otherwise."

"But he must know without my showing, how much I—I like him."

"I do not see how. Were everybody to argue so, we should have no expression of kind feeling."

"You don't doubt my feeling, do you?"

"Then why lead him to doubt it?"

"Suppose he doesn't care, where's the use of my caring, I should like to know? And if he does not, demonstration on my part is the height of impropriety. Isn't it now?"

"My dear Nelly," says Miss Mumford, taking

the little hand extended to her, "no modest girl need be ashamed of behaving honestly and straightforwardly. If you have no reason to regret your feelings, there is no reason in this case (at least, I see none) why you should be so careful to conceal them."

"But are you quite sure he is in earnest? You can't think how cold and reserved he is sometimes."

"It is not for me, my love, to say what I think. You must be a far better judge of Wharton's manner than I. All I can say is, I believe him to be in every respect worthy of you, Nelly. But I must again repeat, what I have so often told you before, if you believe Wharton is paying you his addresses, and you feel after what has passed that you return his affection, you are in duty bound, my child, to speak to your father or your mother

upon the subject. In fact, dear Helen, unless you promise me you will do so, I must either acquaint your father with the truth myself, or refuse to be your only confident any longer."

"It is all very well for you to lecture me in this way, you hard-hearted and cruel old thing, you! But you are assuming a host of things, none of which may be true. Well, well, I know what you are going to say: I promise I will ask papa about it as soon as ever I have made up my own mind. And now I hear a ring at the bell, so I'll be off. Mind you don't betray me." But before Miss Nelly had bidden her *adieux*, the door opened, and in walked the engineer.

The coming and the parting visitor both seemed somewhat confused by this accidental encounter. But the worn countenance of the elder maiden was lit up with a momentary gleam of tenderness

and pleasure. The first impulse of Miss Seabright was to take off her cloak again and postpone her departure; the second, to hurry out of the room as quickly as she could fly. Mr. Wharton was sharp enough to perceive this intention, but could not observe the other.

"Must you go?" said he, detaining her hand in his own firm grasp.

"Yes, they expect me at home, and I have been here ever so long."

"But can you not stay five minutes? I am leaving to-morrow, and shall not see you again for some time."

"Leaving!" exclaimed the girl, with a change of colour, "where are you going?"

"Abroad," said he. "I have work to do in Prussia. They have sent for me. I fear I shall hardly be down here again till midsummer."

"Aren't you going to Tinselby, then?"

"I scarcely know at present; if I can manage it I shall go there for a couple of nights, before I leave."

"Then we shall meet there. You know Lady de Crecy has asked everybody—the castle people I mean—for next week. We shall be a jolly party."

"What day do you go?"

"Monday. So till then, good-bye." "And oh, by the way," said Helen, looking in again after she had closed the door, "we have a school-feast to-morrow, if you think it worth while to honour us. I am afraid you will be very much bored; but the duchess and Selina are coming, and we shall be most happy if you will come too, and help."

When she was gone, "You see," said Wharton,

"what I tell you is true. She would not stop two minutes, though she knew we should not meet again for six months. Heigho! 'Tis all fast and loose with her. I don't know what to make of it." And the speaker flung himself into a chair, and gazed despondingly at the fire.

Miss Mumford looked affectionately at the young man and smiled. "If I were to interpret that manner," said she, "I should draw a much less gloomy inference from it."

"But why was she in such a hurry to be off?" he asked.

"Because, may be, she would have given her ears to stay."

"A strange reason, forsooth; but hardly intelligible to me, I confess. By a like *non sequitur*, I suppose she looked pleased because I am going abroad?"

"She expects to meet you at Tinselby—to stay in the same house with you. Is that nothing?"

"Ah, my dear friend, these favourable opinions are the mere echo of your kind wishes. I cannot see my prospects in the same brilliant light. Her manner has undergone such a very decided change during the last week or so."

"Perhaps she begins to think she has shown enough, and that the time is come for you to be more explicit. 'Nothing venture nothing win.' Do not forget that others may carry off the prize, while you are hesitating to ask for it."

"It is not the success of others, but my own failure that I apprehend. I am not afraid of such rivals as Froth. And what other competitor is there worth a thought? Northern luckily is not in the field; and neither poor little Terrier nor the Rev. Tartlett are very dangerous at present."

"True, there is no fear of Northern. But though Sir Percy may be contemptible as a rival, he may not be so insignificant as a foe."

"He hates me, I know. But I am rather flattered than otherwise by that. It shows he thinks me more successful than himself: as to any harm from such a creature—why I would wring his miserable neck if he provoked me to more than despise him."

"Hugh," said the old lady, lowering her voice, "Colonel Froth means you mischief."

"I don't doubt it," laughed the engineer. "But what mischief can he do me?"

Miss Mumford hobbled to and opened the door: satisfied there were no listeners, she whispered, "He has learnt something about your father."

"The deuce he has!" exclaimed Wharton, with a start. "What makes you think that?"

"His own words. He told me that a friend of his related to him some particulars about Mr. Mombrun's trial, and stated that you were somehow or other connected with the transaction."

"That I was?"

"Yes. This friend used the name of Wharton; and Froth assumed (whether in pretence or not, I cannot say) that you were the person meant. How much he knows, or how ignorant he is, it is impossible to guess. It is certain that he is seeking for particulars to injure you."

"If he thinks it is I who was directly concerned in that unlucky affair, he is very wide of the mark as yet."

"Who can tell what he thinks?"

"Did he say from whom he had gotten the information?"

"No, nor could I question him without danger."

"If Froth hears nothing but truth from his informant, he will learn that my poor father was an honest man. Whatever suspicion may rest on the character of Mombrun, none can attach to the name of my father."

Miss Lavinia sighed. "But you must be on your guard, Hugh. Think what harm he might do you."

"What did he say about Mombrun?" asked Wharton.

"He was very anxious to discover the connexion between Mr. Mombrun and your father. He got nothing out of me."

"Mombrun is to be at the castle to-night," said Wharton; "I must caution him. Froth will never rest till he has ferreted out the truth. And Heaven knows how he may then pervert it to damage me in Helen's eyes."

"Tell Mr. Mombrun," said Miss Lavinia, "that I shall be glad to see him early to-morrow, or if possible this evening. He can come to me after the audit dinner. I will sit up for him. We must never suffer that crafty man to outwit us, my dear. No one is so capable of giving us good advice as Mr. Mombrun, and you know, Hugh, he has your interest at heart as sincerely as I have."

"I know that," returned the engineer, warmly pressing the old lady's withered hand; "though I wish I could believe in his sincerity in all other matters as thoroughly as I believe in yours."

"Ah! Hugh," said she, "you don't understand Mr. Mombrun so well as I do, or you would not speak disparagingly of one who dearly loves you." When Wharton was gone, tears dimmed the eyes which fondly looked out upon his retreating steps.

CHAPTER XI.

When our engineer got back to the castle, Mr. Mombrun had already arrived from London. But there was no possibility of the latter visiting Miss Mumford that afternoon, as it happened to be the rent day of his grace's tenantry; and the duke, who enjoyed of all things having his friends about him at the audit dinner, would have been mightily disappointed had the jovial tutor absented himself from the feast.

The audit-day at Tramways was an event of some importance. Nearly two hundred farmers assembled on this occasion to pay their half-year's

rent, and eat a dinner with the duke. Every quittance was signed by that nobleman himself, and handed by him to the tenant as the agent received the money. So that if any had a grievance the presence of his landlord challenged him to utter it. Now and then some malcontent would complain of Mr. Terrier. The agent had neglected him; his barn let in the rain; or his pigsties were out of order. Another was in distress because his wife "was allust a-layen in," and the duke had often promised to build him another room. The seasons were a grievance too. It was so terribly wet or dry, and wages were going up, and wheat was uncommon low. Notwithstanding these misfortunes they seemed pretty well to do, and I suspect these small complaints were meant to hide their real prosperity.

Punctually at three they all sat down to dinner.

The duke at the head of one long table, the marquis, if present, or Mr. Terrier, presided at another. Excellent of their kinds were the substantial dishes which smoked upon the crowded table. Rounds and sirloins of the stall-fed ox, fatted geese and turkeys by the score, haunches of the havier, and pasties of the doe; topped up with plum-puddings and mince-pies—sauced with flaming brandy. Port, sherry, and old audit ale in due course produced their usual effects; till boisterous grew the din, and loud the merry uproar which sallies of the broadest humour provoked throughout the hall. Then came the toasts, ladled from bowls of steaming punch; and such as had a mind to it lit their long clay pipes: for at these festive meetings the duke forgot his prejudices; his first desire being to see his guests enjoy themselves.

When their landlord's health was drunk, the "one cheer more," with its accompaniment of banging forms and rattling glasses, never failed to reach the ears of the fond old lady in the drawing-room; who proudly informed her friends that they were now drinking long life and happiness to him who was not only the best of landlords, but the best of husbands and of parents. Long life, alas! the wish was somewhat mournful, when one reflected how many times the duchess had listened to those hearty shouts; and consequently, how few of the allotted number remained for celebration.

After the castle family, the rector of Longthorpe and the Tramways agent, and one or two other popular or important personages, were complimented in a similar manner. Mr. Seabright was received with the warmest acclamations.

And Mr. Terrier's speech was looked upon as one of the features of the evening. The rough farmers fully appreciated the merits and the peculiarities of their honest overseer. They knew him to be the most peppery, but the most forgiving, of men. And when, in set terms (which never varied), he, year after year, humbly apologized to them "individually and collectively, for any offences inadvertently given in the discharge of his onerous duties;" and finally "begged to drink all their good healths in return;" some mischievous young wags would banter him about some imaginary shortcoming—and the agent would reseat himself full of wrath and indignation.

When "the strangers'" healths were toasted, Mr. Mombrun responded to the call. The jolly farmers were well acquainted with the style of this guest's oratory, and whenever he was pre-

sent they took care to get him on his legs. Nor was our friend the tutor of that timid and retiring complexion which shrinks from the sort of prominence which now was thrust upon him. The sound of his own voice was not unpleasing to himself; and his deportment and elocution were decidedly histrionic. It was with unfeigned and heartfelt satisfaction that he acknowledged the highest compliment which man could receive from man. Throughout the years which had elapsed since he last attended one of these renowned meetings, it had been his constant and earnest prayer that he might again behold the great and good nobleman now presiding over this august assembly—an assembly composed of men whose fame as scientific agriculturists resounded in the remotest corners of the civilized world. And what fame, he would ask, was more enviable

than that so justly awarded to the promoters of peace and plenty, to the benefactors of mankind, who by their noble toil compel the earth to yield its fruits for the blessed use of all alike? "Yes," cried the speaker, warming to the cheers of his befuddled audience; "glorious is the result which rewards the labour of the farmer. I look around me, and behold in this magnificent hall the signs of unbounded wealth and luxury which a gracious Providence has conferred upon that venerable man whom you have the honour to call your landlord. I look around me upon this illustrious tenantry, and am filled with admiration at the evidence of substance and prosperity which the pleasing sight conveys. I turn my thoughts to the labourer in his cottage, and, in *fancy*, I see him too revelling in the blessings—humble though they be—of comfortable and roomy dwellings, of

well-fed, well-clothed children, of wholesome and abundant food; of all those good things which a grateful and generous employer delights to lavish on the faithful instrument of his own well-being." From this the speaker passed to a somewhat invidious comparison between the "productive" and "destructive" arts, as he termed them. And having provoked a rejoinder from the gallant colonel, by which he skilfully raised the laugh against Sir Percy, he adroitly changed the subject, and bestowed some eloquent praise upon the Marquis of Northern. He dwelt with touching emotion upon the virtues and attainments of the youthful heir; and modestly intimated that the brilliant fame in store for the pupil, could not fail to shed its lustre upon the preceptor. He offered some observations on the advantages of education generally; and illustrated his remarks by several

happy instances of his own success as a teacher. Thus he contrived to bring in a very neat panegyric upon himself; and doubtless believed that he, Mombrun, was about as worthy of these encomiums as were his listeners of those he bestowed on them.

After the party dispersed, Wharton took the first opportunity to acquaint his father that Miss Lavinia was anxious to see him at the cottage. Mr. Mombrun however was in no haste to obey this summons: for he reflected that the poor old maid was in a state of chronic anxiety on that score, and he little guessed that his own interests were at stake. Besides which, our friend had an abiding preference for fashionable society; and proposed to regale himself for an hour or two in the presence of the ladies, whom the duke and the other gentlemen now joined. Nothing could

be more amusing than the entertainment with which this talented mimic provided them. His imitations of the farmers' manners and speeches were comic in the extreme. He repeated whole dialogues which he pretended to have overheard; changing his voice and features with surprising skill. So perfect indeed were his representations, that no one would have supposed the narrator had given them a hundred times elsewhere, with other circumstances and other names. His imagination and his memory were inexhaustible, and he might have kept his company amused till bed-time, had not Wharton again reminded him that Miss Mumford was sitting up; adding, that it would be a great favour if he would go at once; since the matter in hand was of importance to himself. Upon this Mombrun entreated the duchess to excuse him. Before he left the castle, however, he

sent for the marquis' valet, from whom he procured one of his lordship's best cigars. And puffing the grateful fumes into the bright and frosty air, he wrapped his cloak about him, and walked gaily to the cottage.

CHAPTER XII.

LONG before the hour at which her visitor arrived, Miss Lavinia, on any other night would have laid aside her book and knitting, would have read the evening prayers to her small establishment, and have retired to bed; either to sleep or suffer, as the case might be. Not so had the old maid done to-night. She continued reading till her eyes began to ache; she knitted till her fingers stiffened: but though her body failed her, there was no weariness in Miss Lavinia's spirit. She was watchfully awake. Her attire even, betokened something quite unusual. She was dressed in her

brown satin gown, and wore her brand new front; both of which were reserved for state occasions. Some little bits of finery, too, which still more rarely saw the light—a Trichinopoly chain, an enamelled repeater, a pair of velvet bands for the wrists, with fine steel buckles to them, and a brooch containing hair, set round with small discoloured pearls, were now plucked from their hiding-places to fascinate those eyes which once perchance they might have helped to dazzle. Miss Mumford was prepared to watch till any hour. That *he* should come and find *her* door closed upon him was a thought more dreadful than a sleepless night. If Wharton only mentioned why she wished to see him, Mombrun would surely come. The lateness of the hour, the fact of keeping her from rest (she knew that quite well) would not occur to him: nay, if it did, would not induce him to accelerate

his movements or derange his purposes by a minute. Did this knowledge give her pain? Scarcely a passing pang. What was she that such a man should suffer inconvenience for her? a poor old crippled withered woman. Pah! how yellow and how wrinkled was her skin! This front too was not so good a fit as the old one. Did the white hair show beneath the cap behind? she wondered. Ha! she had forgotten to put her trumpet out of sight. She must not have him fancy she was getting deaf. Poor old soul! Into what strange absurdities that fluttering heart of hers was leading her. But are women of seventy the only ones to wear false *fronts?* Is hypocrisy never practised till deception is impossible? Tut! Lobelia's smiles are falser than her paint. And Hyacinthus is as full of artifice as his coat is full of wadding. Nor is it love alone which inspires

the gentle art of lying. Hatred, covetousness, envy, and many other passions, teach both young and old how natural, how useful, and how pleasant is Deception.

"My dear Lavinia, I am charmed to see you. I have been longing to get here these two hours, but the duchess would not let me go."

"Ah! Hugh, you should not have thought of me;" and as the lady believed everything uttered by those lips, she believed even this excuse; and almost blushed as she grasped the hand of the reprobate enchanter. "But I thought you would come at last," she added.

"Come!" exclaims Mombrun, settling himself comfortably in Miss Lavinia's particular arm-chair. "Of course! you know I could not sleep a night at Tramways without a friendly touch of this dear hand."

"And how have you been prospering? I have not had a syllable from you lately."

"The same as ever: churning a miserable subsistence out of the London mire. I have not had the courage to write to you. Why should I grieve the one kind heart I value most by a picture of distress like mine?"

"And yet you knew I would sooner starve than that you or yours should feel a want."

"I did and do know it," he cried, with genuine emotion. "May God bless and reward you a thousandfold for every good and noble act you have done to me. But I am not here to vex you with the stale story of my misfortunes. You have something to tell me about the boy. How goes the love affair? Has he any chance? He says nothing to me, and answers all my questions as if the interest I show were not genuine. Ah

Lavinia! how little he dreams what concern must be mine for all that affects his happiness."

"Wait a bit," says Miss Lavinia, hobbling to the bell. "I will send the servants to bed, then we can talk at leisure. You don't want anything? A dish of tea? a little wine and water?"

"No," said he, hesitatingly. "No—yet stay. If there be such a thing in your store-room as one drop of Geneva—the doctor tells me I ought to take nothing else: but, God help me! the more I drink the worse I am."

"And now," says Miss Mumford, placing by Mombrun's side the soda-water and spirits, which she had provided beforehand, "you shall hear all I have to tell. But bless me!" she cried, as a new thought struck her; "How will you get in at the castle? Do they know where you are?"

"Yes, yes, I bade the porter sit up for me. 'Twill do him good, the lazy rascal—what's he paid for, I should like to know?"

"Well then," Miss Lavinia began, "as to Hugh's affairs, upon the whole I think we may say the prospect is encouraging. He is much in love, and the girl has a decided preference for him. They meet frequently, and she receives his addresses, as it seems to me, with modesty, but in a way that shows at least that they are not distasteful to her. Hugh, like a true lover, is ever desponding—thinks his case hopeless because she will not throw herself into his arms. And Helen has too much spirit to confess till he has declared himself to her."

"This sounds well. But what about Northern? Are you satisfied there is no danger there?"

Miss Mumford significantly shook her head.

"What, still scorching himself in the old flame, eh?"

Miss Mumford nodded.

"That's fortunate; and Froth, what of him?"

"I wish I could say there was as little to be afraid of there."

"You do not mean to tell me that fellow is likely to thwart us?"

"He will do his utmost, you may rely upon it."

"What can he do if Helen Seabright does not fancy him? The rector is above any vulgar prejudices for rank; and though the mother may make a stand, the girl is sure to marry whom she likes."

"Wharton, this is not the evil I am apprehensive of." Miss Lavinia lowered her voice to a whisper, "Froth is aware of the connection between the boy and you."

"What!" shrieked Mombrun, starting from his chair. "He knows that Hugh and I are father and son? impossible!"

"Hush! not so loud. I do not say that: but he——"

"Does he know who I am?" impatiently cried the other. "Does Percy Froth know my real name?"

"He has discovered that the name Mombrun is assumed."

"Did he tell you so?"

"He did. He is aware moreover that you took your present name in consequence of the trial."

"'He knows then that I was tried for forgery?"

"He does; and, as I said just now, suspects, if he does not know, the relation between you and Hugh. How much or how little of the truth he is in possession of, it is impossible to say. This

is certain, he hates Hugh as a rival, and will use any information he has to injure him with the girl and with her family."

"Retribution!" groaned the unhappy man.

"I do not believe he can do any serious mischief," said Miss Mumford, thinking to soothe the other's pain.

"No serious mischief? No serious mischief, Lavinia? Good God! Do you not see that he will ruin me by exposure—that he will break to Hugh the secret which all my life I have been struggling to conceal; and by frustrating the poor boy's marriage, and proclaiming him a felon's son, that he will teach him to loathe and curse the wretched father, who has brought him to such misery?" Mombrun hid his face between his hands, and writhed before the images which he had conjured up. "When did you learn all

this?" he cried with sudden fierceness. "Did the scoundrel come here expressly to announce these discoveries to you?"

"He came to sound me, but did not gather much, as you may readily suppose."

"Who was his informant?"

"A friend of his father's, so he said."

"A living friend?"

"If my memory serves me, he stated it was t'other day only that his friend had told him."

"Curse him, and his friend too!"

"After all," blandly interposed Lavinia, "his knowledge may be as imperfect as he pretended. If we might trust his words, he had no suspicion that your name is Wharton. He seemed to believe that Hugh and the Wharton who was tried were one and the same person. Of your real name he professed entire ignorance."

"What then makes you fancy that he suspects elationship?"

"I may be wrong. It was only my mistrust of the man that led me to suppose his ignorance was to a great extent put on. If we could but find out who told him—something might be done."

"Pshaw!" sneered the other peevishly. "Where's the use of talking so? What the d—l could I do if I did know his friend? The chances are, his friend is my enemy; and would only help to ruin me, as hundreds have done before him."

"Come, come, my friend, don't give way so. We must get the marriage settled before Froth has time to harm us. Hugh must speak up, and press Helen for an answer. If she be what I take her for, she cannot but say 'Yes.' As to

any other mischief, I defy him. That Hugh could ever be so base as to think ill of you, I will not believe. And for yourself—is not your own clear conscience proof against *any* malice!"

In this way, with tact and tenderness and courage, Miss Mumford managed to dispel Mombrun's uneasiness, and when his potations were at an end, he even thanked her for the warning; and with maudlin eloquence expressed his gratitude for other little favours—to wit, bank-notes, etc.; and gave a receipt in full, upon the trembling hand that had withered in his service.

CHAPTER XIV.

On the day annually appointed for the Longthorpe school-feast the abbey was a scene of extraordinary bustle and animation. Mrs. Seabright was in her element. She fussed and fidgeted and scolded and coaxed, and turned the house and its contents upside down. She borrowed gardeners, and plants innumerable, from the castle, to decorate the servants' hall. She was in and out the kitchen a dozen times to look after the buns and cakes for the children, and other delicacies preparing for the visitors. With her own hands she got out the beautiful service of

old china, which was considered equal to the best Dresden set at Tramways. She helped the housemaid to take the covers off the furniture. She was in the pantry to give orders to the footman. Not satisfied with Helen's taste, she made fifty alterations on the Christmas tree. She was dressed at least two hours before any one came; but as she superintended her daughter's toilet, and had a thousand other jobs to see to, she was in a red-hot fuss when her guests arrived.

The duke and duchess were always present at these festivals; and Mrs. Seabright took the opportunity to patronize her neighbours by treating them to a sight of these grandees. She herself would have confined her selection to the *elite* of the district, and have made a favour of admitting her relatives the Griffithses. But her husband would not hear of this. He declared

that all who contributed to the school's support had a positive right to be included. The consequence was, not only the Griffithses, but Mr. Bompas the apothecary, Mr. Coles the linen-draper, and every respectable tradesman in the town, were invited with their families; and had the unspeakable delight of taking their refreshment in company with the nobility.

When the lady of the house conducted their graces to what, in order to obviate its modern title, she called the 'refractory,' the children were already hard at work stuffing themselves with buns; the rector, with sleeves turned up and beaming countenance, was busy replenishing empty plates; and Miss Helen was attending to the aged almspeople. Seeing Miss Seabright thus occupied, Lord Northern and Colonel Froth gallantly offered their services. Whereupon the young

lady directed the marquis to carry round a watering-pot full of tea, while Sir Percy was ordered to bear a tray of mugs, and she herself distributed them when filled. But the mischievous young nobleman caused the mugs to overflow, and the baronet upset them; so between the two, the children lost their tea, and Miss Helen lost her temper. The duke had taken a seat at the table of the almshouse women, and to judge by the cackling of the aged beldams his remarks were full of witty and pleasing allusions to their youthful days.

"Eh, deary mey!" says Molly Wright, "Hey wor as loik young lord theer as two handfuls o' male out o' same sack."

"Aye, but hey's a gainly mon to this dee!" responds her neighbour, "and there's mony good tune gotten out o' an old fiddle, Molly."

Mrs. Griffiths and Mrs. Coles were lost in admiration at his grace's condescension, and whispered in each other's ears that it was a "beautiful sight" to see him.

Behind the crowd of visitors stood our friend the engineer, not over pleased at the conduct of a certain young lady, who evidently had no intention of leaving either pleasures or duties to seek the moody gentleman who kept aloof from her. Viewed across the distance, which he himself declined to traverse, Miss Helen seemed equally delighted by the addresses and attentions of both her cavaliers. The very cakes which she kept handing to the brats (confound them!) were objects of his jealousy and objurgations. Nor was this amiable temper much pacified by the counter-irritation of Miss Anita Coles, a virgin of a scientific turn, who sought to establish a personal

sympathy with Mr. Wharton through the medium of the moon. Did it, or did it not, revolve upon its own axis? (For the sake of argument she would have taken either side). Was it inhabited? And by whom? Did Mr. Wharton believe it to be the abode of disembodied spirits? What a fearful evil to be without water—and consequently, without tea.

"I'll try to get you some," says Wharton, who heard nothing but the final sentence; and brusquely turned from her, to seek Miss Helen Seabright.

His manner of accosting this young lady was cold and formal; but failed apparently to wound as deeply as intended.

She said her "How d'ye do?" as naturally as could be; and added, "I can't shake hands, I'm covered with jam and butter." Then turning

gayly to lord Northern, bade him help Sir Percy to light the tapers on the Christmas tree.

"Can I assist you?" says the engineer, with a mighty effort at complacency.

"You can help *them*," says Nelly, pointing to the tree. "I must be off and wash my hands, and then give out the presents to the children."

Poor Wharton! he could not understand how this lighthearted little wren could keep jinking about the tree while he was so disconsolate. And quite genuine too was her enjoyment. She had no notion of Wharton or any one else being miserable merely because other people were happy. Yet the merrier the evening grew the more he felt depressed. When the toys were given away, and the children began to romp, and penny trumpets squeaked, and drums began to rattle, this irritated and spooney gentleman felt much

inclined to hang himself. Between this frantic uproar and his own dark broodings the discord was appalling. Froth was a demon whom he longed to strangle, Northern was a profligate young rake, and Miss Helen Seabright as base a flirt as ever blighted the heart of man. To think how he had counted on this last interview, before his going abroad! Something, he had promised himself, would surely come of it to give him the opportunity that he yearned for. What joy ineffable to find that in the midst of all her occupations he and he alone engaged her every care. The secret glances of understanding that would pass between them; the half-spoken nothings; the little jests; the blissful smiles; and then at last perhaps, (who knew?) the sweet acknowledgment of her own long-cherished and devoted love. (Perdition catch those imps! their yells will split

his head into two.) Even her hand she had refused to give him. O Poetry! O Romance! can such dreams be, and end in Jam and Butter!

"Where are you off to, Hugh?" inquires Mr. Mombrun, as the engineer pushes past his father on his way to the outer door.

"Home," was the laconic answer.

"What, in such a storm? It is snowing like fury."

"Is it?" says the other, meaning "What the deuce is that to me?"

"You do not mean to walk?" says the anxious parent.

"How else am I to go?" snarls the son.

"In those boots!"

"Who cares now what boots I wear?" thought Mr. Hugh. "I've got a headache," was his answer, "and the walk will do me good."

"But will they not think it strange if you run away so early? Have you made your excuses to Miss Helen?"

"*She* will certainly not miss me."

"You are mistaken, my boy: she has watched you as a cat watches a mouse. I've seen her eyes upon you a dozen times when your head was turned away."

"Cat and mouse!" re-echoed the cynic with a tragic smile; "the simile is appropriate. Fast and loose is just her favourite game. Steel claws and velvet paws. Let her find another victim—I have had enough of it."

"Stop a moment, Hugh, don't be in such a hurry. You are quite wrong. I have stood aside this hour, or more, and noticed both her conduct and yours. You have never been near her but once, and then only to freeze her with formality. Tut man! don't

tell me: if your words were only half as civil as your manner, I wonder she didn't box your ears. You are furious now because she does not throw herself at your feet and beg your High-and-mightiness to forgive her."

"I'm not angry with her; of course Miss Seabright has a right to do as she pleases, and flirt with ——"

"Flirt with fiddlesticks, you goose, you! Why, if she says but 'Yes' or 'No' to any other man, you think she is planning an elopement. Aren't you ashamed of yourself now? Here's a girl whose business it is for an hour or two to please every one around her, to attend to fifty things at once, and to bear in mind—which you refuse to—that every person here is watching her. Be reasonable. Wait till the party is over. I promise you, when people are gone, you will have

nothing to complain of,—provided you yourself behave with decency."

"No, no! it does not depend on me, sir. What you say about her duties is right enough; but I hate all this humbug and tomfoolery. The fact is, she does not know her own mind; and until she learns it I had better keep away."

"The young ninny!" exclaims Mombrun to Miss Lavinia, who was waiting in a corner to hear the upshot of this dialogue; "I have no patience with him. He will go and fret himself for nothing, when half-an-hour's waiting I would have made him happy. I should not be astonished if he takes a huff and leaves the field altogether to Froth. When Hugh gets a notion into his head you may as well argue with a dray horse."

"Ah," sighs Miss Lavinia, "when people are in love, there is no accounting for their actions."

Indeed for the matter of inconsistency, it would be difficult to find a stronger proof than Wharton's conduct. For no sooner was he on his way to the castle than, cooled probably by the snow and slop with which he was soaked through, he began to reconsider the arguments of Mombrun. Nor was he long in discerning how rational these were, and how remarkably the reverse he himself had been. So far from Helen's conduct appearing to him reprehensible, he did not see how she could possibly have acted otherwise. In short, although the wind was blowing the sleet into his eyes, and the evening was so dark he could scarcely find his way, Miss Helen's image shone before him in such brilliant and glowing colours that she now appeared a thousand times more perfect and more beautiful than before: and had it not been that he was covered with mud and drenched to the skin, he must certainly have retraced his steps to

tell her what he felt. Unable to do this, however, he was forced to pursue his way, and console himself amid the luxuries of his apartment at the castle, by rehearsing again and again the reflections which had occurred to him on the road.

The more he ruminated upon the many charms concentrated in the person of Miss Seabright, the more was he provoked by the remembrance of his folly. He cursed his petulance and impatience for leaving her without having given, or obtained, some positive proofs of mutual attachment. He reflected with dismay upon the separation which his professional ties rendered unavoidable, and the shortness of the time now left in which to bring matters to a climax. The opportunities of meeting had not been half so frequent as he had hoped for; and, dolt that he was! he had allowed one of the best of them to slip, without turning it to advantage. In fact, his conduct that

evening might have the most disastrous consequences. If Helen were wavering, if she were doubtful as to his intentions, if she had any leaning towards Froth, this treatment of her by himself was quite enough to ruin him—just the weight thrown into the balance that would turn it in a rival's favour. At best she must think him rude, capricious, and ill-tempered, and how mortifying thus to lower himself in her esteem, when there was no time left to efface the bad impression. What was to be done? He must certainly see her without loss of time. It would be intolerable to wait until they met at Tinselby. He must see her to-morrow, and explain—make some excuse, plead head-ache—business—for his abrupt departure. Ah! yes, if he could only see her, she would forgive him instantly, and the reconciliation would make amends for everything. She was so

kind, so gentle, so forgiving! and—so loving! What else did that look mean when, etc.? and that dear pressure of the hand last Monday week? Poor little woman! How she would nestle that darling face upon his manly bosom, when she whispered her tender secret in his beard! How pert and winning all her ways would be when they were alone at ease in the delicious confidence of entire oneness. How he would shelter that gentle form from the buffets of misfortune! How bravely he himself could face life's labours, cheered on by that sweet partner of his toils! And his case (like every other lover's) being a peculiar one, he indulged in a thousand other visions very similar to the above, both for their agreeableness and their originality.

Meanwhile, what was the object of this reverie, the fair Helen, doing? Did she pine in her

Wharton's absence? Was she indifferent? Or was she gay? To tell the truth, she was so busy with her school children and her guests, with her lords, baronets, and curates, that she had no time to discover whether Wharton was gone or not. She may have missed him (we must allow it was so), but she knew his aversion to gayeties of this noisy kind, and thought (at least, at first) that he was in the background waiting till she was free. So she gave herself up to the amusements; and these as yet were in nowise on the wane. To her there could be no greater pleasure than to see her dear papa enjoy himself; and that good man was in the greatest glee at the sight of the happy faces round him. After the prizes were distributed, Mr. Seabright delivered an apposite oration, which we may be sure was seasoned with some excellent and serious advice becoming the

earnestness and simplicity of the pastor's character. Nor would the most thoughtless person present have dreamed of even smiling at his unaffected piety, had not one or two naughty boys upset the gravity of the audience by "taking sights" behind his back. The speaker however was too wrapped in his discourse to notice any tittering; and having spoken, soon joined the loudest laughers at blind man's buff, and other sports, which he himself took part in. No wonder that Miss Helen was diverted by her father's pleasant ways: who would not be to see him rushing to the rescue of the weak; or select some timid little fellow from the outskirts, and line his empty pockets with a pippin or two, and then withdraw to watch him munch them in sweet security and retirement.

With just the same delight his friend the kind

old duke assisted in the youthful frolics. They were a pair of boys, as juvenile as any. When the game had sides, each took part against the other. At "French and English" they tugged the rope at opposite ends with all the animus of traditional hostility; and by-and-by, when the balance of power sways rather to the parson's tide, the duke whispers to some foremost lad, who grinning, whips out his knife and slily cuts the tight-stretched rope in two. Down plumps the rector beneath the scrambling pile; and while the old duke shouts and laughs, he incites the boys to climb and fall again upon his roaring prostrate friend.

When all was over Miss Lavinia Mumford alone remained behind, trusting that Helen Seabright might broach the subject which the old maid hoped was nearest to the young maid's heart.

She had however some time to wait; Miss Nelly was ready, as it seemed, to talk till midnight on every topic but her lover. Her mother too was present, and her mother could speak of nothing but their graces and Lord Northern. The duke had so enjoyed himself. The duke had taken tea with the almshouse women. How fortunate she had given them the parlour tea and not forgotten cream. How fascinating the old man was! He had a word for everybody. He had spoken to sister Griffiths, and to Mrs. Coles and Mrs. This and Mrs. That. And what a boy he was! When John and he were got together they were for all the world like babes. To think of him cutting the rope like that! But he must have his joke let what would come of it. And then the duchess too! Hadn't she been gracious? She said as she never saw a party go off nicer. And

as for Helen, her grace was quite extravagant in praise. 'If she was me,' she said, 'she should be proud of such a daughter.' Who could not see with half-an-eye what the duchess meant by 'daughter'? Miss Lavinia could see as well as any one. And if a certain nobleman, whose name began with N, did wish to be her son-in-law, *she* had no objections, and she didn't care who knew it! "Kiss me, my darling!" cries this happy ancestress of a ducal race.

"I don't mind doing that, mother," returns Miss Helen, coldly. "But I do wish you wouldn't keep on talking such a deal of nonsense. I've told you lots of times that Northern no more thinks of me than I of him. I'm sick of having him thrust down my throat every day; as if there was nobody else in the world that one could like but him."

"I'm sure, my love," says Mrs. Seabright, "there is nobody else so much attached to you: and if there is a thing could give your mother happiness, it would be to see my Helen the Marchioness of Northern."

Miss Seabright looked as if she were about to put an end to these remarks by some rebuke more pointed than the former; fortunately Miss Lavinia's carriage was now announced. The old maid therefore requested Helen to help her downstairs. And when they reached the cloak-room she closed the door, and went at once to business. "Well, my dear," said she, "I hope you have had a happy day; and are not knocked up with all your efforts and excitement."

"I am not a bit tired," said Helen, pretending not to find Miss Mumford's cloak; "I shouldn't mind having it over again."

"Everything went off so satisfactorily," says Lavinia.

"Yes, that is—well—everything to do with the children, and the party."

"I am sure," says the elder spinster, "I never saw a man look more in love."

"I never saw one choose so strange a way of showing it then."

"Why what did he do dear, to displease you?"

"Do! Oh I don't know. Nothing, I suppose. Why he never spoke to me but once, never came near me. And then he left the house an hour before the rest, and wouldn't even say 'good night.' I never knew a man behave so rudely in my life—never. But he shall soon see I wont stand that sort of thing. I'll never speak to him again, I declare I won't."

"My dear Helen, calm yourself. Excitement

and fatigue have made you nervous. I would not have spoken to you on this subject to-night if I had imagined it would so annoy you. But you must not allow yourself to be worried with such false notions as I see possess you now. Perhaps, my dear, there may be faults on both sides. You may have done something to hurt Hugh's feelings. Are you sure that you were civil to him? Perhaps you suffered Sir Percy, or Lord Northern, to be a little too attentive. You must make allowance for a lover's feelings. And who knows, Helen dear, but the poor man may be very unhappy at this moment, thinking how cruel and unkind you were."

"I'm sure I never meant to be unkind; it is he that is cruel, not me. Lord Northern and Sir Percy Froth indeed! He might know by this time that Colonel Froth is nothing to me. And

as to Northern, why we are like brother and sister. If there is anything I hate its jealousy. There! you may tell him so. Unkind! I should like to know how I was to spend my time making up to Mr. Wharton when I had everybody in the house to look to. He might have guessed I would sooner have spo—ken to him than—a—anybody—el-el-se," sobbed Helen, fairly breaking down in her vexation. "It's very ungenerous of him! I'm sure I don't want to make him miserable, and if I did allow Sir Percy—the odious man! what did he come here at all for, to make people wretched?—if I did allow him to follow me about so, I couldn't help it. There, I'm not going to make a fool of myself. Men are such stupid brutes; and I hate 'em all alike," cries this spirited young creature, laughing half-hysterically through her tears. Notwithstanding this assurance, however, the elder

lady seemed well satisfied, and they immediately fell to kissing with an ardour quite surprising. How significant this simple operation may be, their own fair sex alone can fully comprehend.

CHAPTER XV.

On the following morning Miss Mumford sallied forth to make an early call at Tramways. Ostensibly (to herself that is) the object of the visit was to set matters straight between the lovers. If there were any latent design on this romantic creature's part to behold her own Antinous, this is no affair of ours; the dear old maid did not acknowledge to herself that any such motive stirred within her. To be sure, it was her duty to let the father know how Miss Seabright was disposed towards his son; especially as no one was so competent as he to give the best advice, whatever the extremity might be.

At once on her arrival, therefore, she bade a footman acquaint Mombrun that she was in the drawing-room. Attending his presence, she engaged in conversation with Selina. Her ladyship was delighted at this opportunity of conversing with Miss Mumford. The festival of the day before had provided food for infinite speculation. She was in the highest spirits at the evidences she had noted of the satisfactory state of things between her brother and the heiress. She laughed at Miss Lavinia for her incredulity; and asked ironically whether this obstinate person still held to her opinion since the events of the preceding evening. It happened that Miss Lavinia was unusually hard of hearing this morning; Lady Selina could with difficulty get an appropriate reply. And such answers as she did elicit, were so ambiguous that no encouragement could be drawn from them.

It was not long, however, before Mombrun appeared; and foreseeing that her ladyship would be no less objectionable on this occasion than he had found her on many others, began at once by saying, "You sent for me, Miss Mumford; I suppose you wish to see me upon business. I will wait in the library until you are at liberty."

Lady Selina, who had a fixed dislike to her brother's former tutor, made the most, internally, of the inuendo. She kept the gentleman waiting as long as she was able. When the old maid joined Mombrun she gave him, without betraying Nelly's confidence, a pretty good idea of what had passed before she left the abbey. Mombrun informed her that he had seen and talked with Hugh; and more than ever was persuaded that the happiness of his son depended on the issue of the courtship. After much deliberation it was

decided that Miss Mumford should see the enamoured youth, and advise him to make his peace with the offended damsel without delay; and if she gave him any opening whatever, to seize upon it at once, and have the marriage settled before he left the country.

It is so easy for lookers-on to play the game which others are engaged in. What blots we have detected when we ourselves were standers-by. What brilliant moves that were not made! Our fingers itched to push the player's queen, to wrench the poker from his hands, to snatch away the ravelled skein, and show him "how to do it." How strange! when *we*—who are so clever—have any of life's gordian knots to puzzle over, when *we* sit down before the chequered board, that we also complicate the tangle—we also are checkmated: and when we think to make a blaze, we too

poke out the fire! Who would wish for counsellors shrewder than Miss Lavinia and Mombrun? Yet, was their advice the best that could be given? You may be sure that it was well received. No one was more tractable than our engineer when desired to do what he himself determined on. In such a hurry was he to comply, he could not rest until his fate was known. He wanted to be off at once, and learn the worst before the day was over. Then he reflected that his invasion of the abbey so soon after meeting with Miss Seabright might create alarm, might unnerve her, and put her on her guard. *Varium et mutabile*—women must be taken in the humour. Helen of all women was—fickle? No, but difficult. He bethought him also of the duchess. Should he make a confident of her? She, good soul, would plunge at once into the depths of his romance,

would do anything he wished for two such favourites as himself and Helen. A quiet dinner at the castle—say, the Seabrights and just enough to make a little party. In this way their meeting would be natural. And—confound it! it was Saturday, the parson could not come. And so it must be on the morrow. Four and twenty hours of suspense! And yet while they were unconsumed, what day-dreams might he not indulge in. Still, dreams are not realities, and the time lagged heavily. Towards evening he tramped about the lanes around the abbey. But they were comfortless and sloppy. Miss Helen preferred her fireside. So Wharton did not meet her, and had to wait till Sunday.

Sweet day of rest for toiling man and beasts! What impious wretch can call in doubt thy origin, or spend thee otherwise than in offices of praise

and gratitude! Hail holy day of recreation! Let all men celebrate thee with innocent enjoyment. Let old and young keep holiday. If the day be fine you may see the lions, and lionesses—the latter in Parisian bonnets—in the Regent's Park. If you can afford it, you may dine at Skindle's, and paddle on the Thames beneath the leafy banks of Clifden. And if you know a maiden who is pining for your love, go do as Wharton did, and tell her yours on Sunday. But by Cupid? I conjure you, say nothing about it unless you're sure of this same 'pining': for otherwise you'll wish, as Wharton wished, that you had waited for the Monday.

May be any day but the one he chose would have served his purpose better. Every Sabbath Miss Helen virtuously went twice to church; Miss Helen also attended at the Sunday school. Now

between the time so spent and that industriously occupied in private meditation—upon her dress, how, I should like to know, was Wharton to find an opportunity to propose to her? Yet opportunity was the one essential requisite to success. The headstrong youth was conscious of the fact; but such was his impatience, he resolved to force it. The incident took place as follows.

There were, as we have stated, two churches in the town of Longthorpe. The rector and his curate performed the duty alternately at each of them. Miss Seabright accompanied her father. Wharton intended on this occasion to do likewise. It happened however that our lover, who forgot to ask which church the rector preached at, unfortunately hit upon the wrong one; and such was the length of Mr. Tartlett's sermon that long before the curate blessed his congregation, that of Mr.

Seabright had gone home. The disappointment only served to whet poor Wharton's haste. When church was over in the afternoon, Miss Seabright was hardly out before he pounced upon her. He meant to walk back with her to the abbey; and, should no favourable moment offer, to request point-blank the favour of a private conference.

Was Helen conscious of the young man's purpose? 'Tis said that women know instinctively when men have reached this crisis. They know most surely when a man's in love with them: and when events are long foreshadowed, prescience is not so marvellous. She saw his face was very white —his features very rigid. His disdain of conventionalities moreover bespoke some weighty argument in store. Miss Seabright was in trouble. The situation was the more embarrassing that, de-

tained by clerical duties, her father remained behind. Her mother was not with her, she was quite alone.

"Is Mr. Seabright not coming out?" asks Wharton in a husky voice.

"No," says Nelly, nervously, "he is busy with the children that are going to be confirmed."

"Are you walking back alone, then?"

"Yes—no, that is I shall wait till papa has done."

"He may be half an hour, let me escort you to the abbey."

"No thank you, I'd rather wait."

"Be persuaded. Do! I have something of importance to say to you."

"No; I must wait. He won't be long. I'll go back to the church and find him."

"Why will you not walk home with me?"

"Because—because I'd rather not."

"Then I beg it as a favour."

"Certainly not. Why do you follow me? Pray leave me—I must go back to papa."

"Miss Seabright, I wish to speak to you—two words—Hear me, Helen."

"Let me go, sir! What is it you want? Why do you frighten me so? I wish you would leave me. I'm sure there is nothing you can have to say to me that—that I can listen to here."

"Why this cruelty? What have I done to deserve this treatment—except the sin of loving you? But this declaration—Heaven knows why—offends you. Forgive my impetuosity, I could not leave England without speaking, and this was my only chance. Helen, will you be my wife?"

"No."

"No! You do not mean this hasty answer to be final; do you?"

"I do."

"Then pardon my presumption, I thought you were in earnest: I was deceived; the fault is all my own: good-bye."

He raised his hat, bowed stiffly, and was gone.

END OF VOL. I.